

THE Christian CENTURY

Thinking Critically. Living Faithfully.

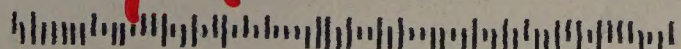


MORMONS ON THE MOVE

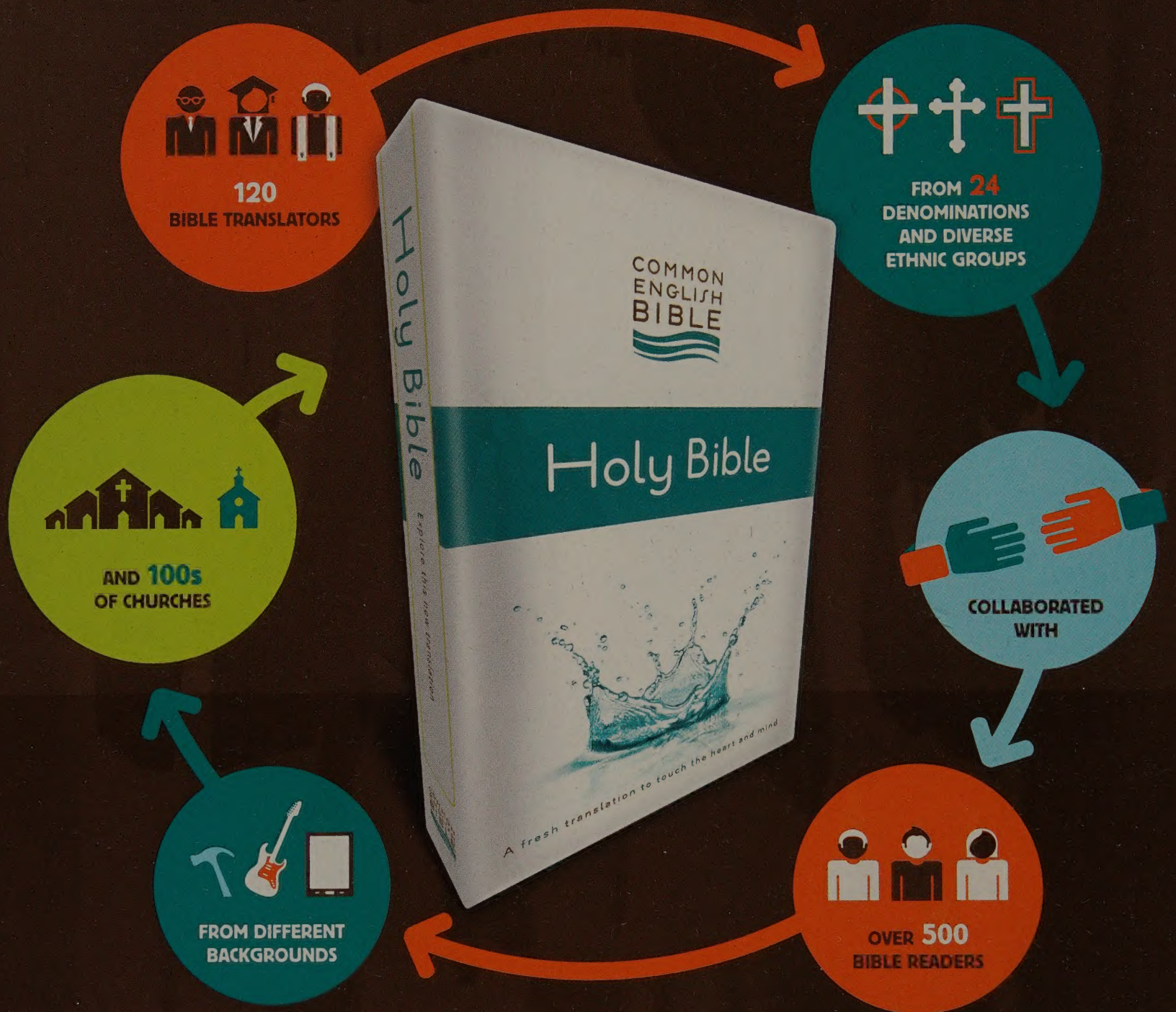
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Preaching for a decision

IN HIS ESSAY in this issue (p. 10), Lutheran pastor Peter Marty recalls a question he was asked during an interview for his first parish assignment. The question bothered him at the time, but it's one he kept pondering. His recollection reminded me of a question I was asked in an interview years ago. It bothered me at the time, and it also has stayed with me.

I had been ordained for a month and was meeting with two people appointed to evaluate my fitness for ministry. One of them became a dear friend and mentor; the other was a former missionary in Egypt, a fire-breathing evangelical who was legendary for publicly opposing pretty much everything the Presbyterian Church did or said. It was 1963: the church was talking about civil rights, poverty and peace. The former missionary didn't think the three causes had anything to do with ministry and said so. Since I believed that those issues were central to ministry, I knew the interview was going to be difficult at best—and perhaps a vocation-changing tragedy.

The questions were tough, and asked in a way that I perceived as accusative. As the missionary pressed me with questions about my personal faith and priorities, the gentler interrogator would bail me out. The question that I've never forgotten was, "Do you preach for a decision?" I knew what he meant. I knew that his sermons concluded with an altar

call inviting people to make a "decision for Christ"—accepting Jesus Christ as personal Lord and Savior—on the spot.

I said that my own decision for Christ was a process, not a one-time event, and had been going on for years. The really important thing about decision, I insisted, was that in Christ God had made a decision about human beings, including me. My questioner was not impressed. "But do you preach for a decision?" he persisted. Sensing that things were getting serious, I mumbled, "Yes, I preach for a decision."

The question has haunted me. We preachers proclaim good news and speak about all the amazing ways that good news penetrates, comforts, challenges and transforms lives. But my questioner had a point: proclaiming good news ought to in some way lead to a response, a decision of some kind. Otherwise proclaiming the good news of unconditional divine love can be an exercise in what Dietrich Bonhoeffer called "cheap grace." Preaching ought to lead to people caring more, giving more and living more. It is the assurance of God's presence, to be sure, and it is testimony to God's healing love. But it is also an invitation to do something.

If we wrap up the Sunday morning service without posing a question to be answered, a challenge or an invitation, we have left critical work undone.

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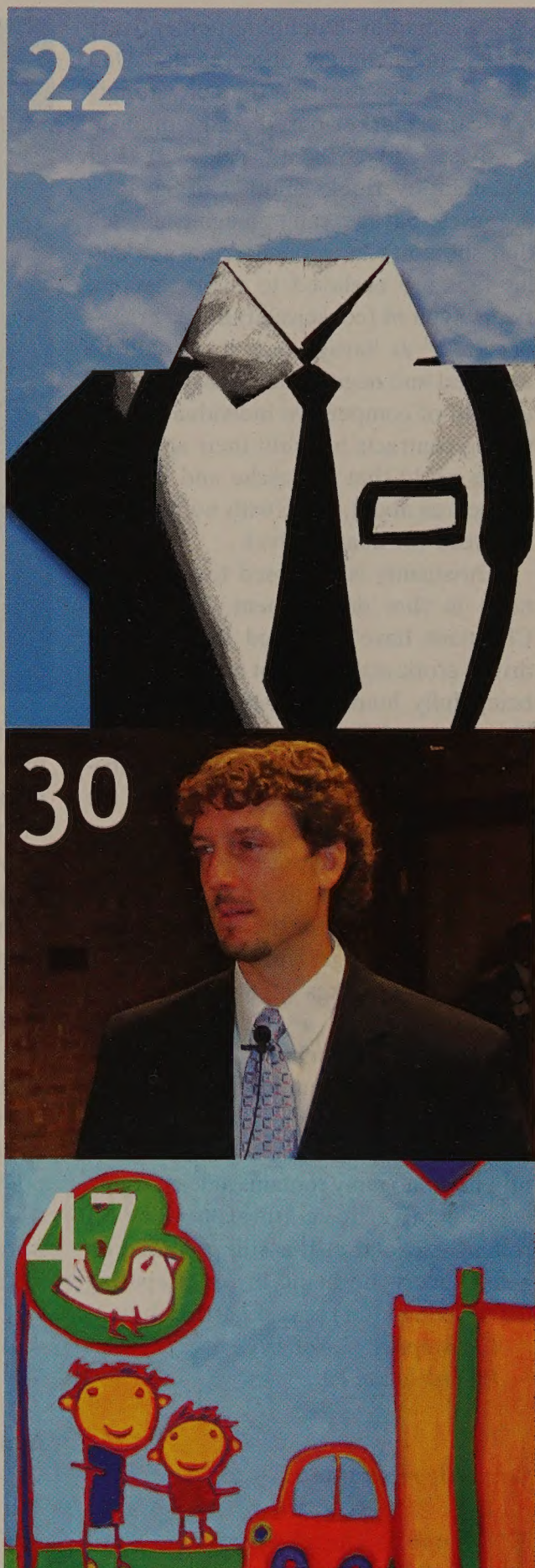
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Noncompulsory sex

Benjamin Dueholm perceptively and helpfully observes that Dan Savage's sexual ethics unwittingly replicate market-based individualism ("Advice and consent," Aug. 23). But Dueholm overlooks another of Savage's premises: Savage can't imagine an itch that shouldn't be scratched. Savage and his fans are enslaved to their passions. Every type of (consensual) erotic urge—or "kink," as Savage puts it—should be explored and negotiated. Savage's world, a world of competitive individuals negotiating contracts to fulfill their appetites, is the world that Nietzsche and Hobbes warned us about, a life with no place for the weak (or unattractive).

Christianity is supposed to bear good news in that environment. Historically, Christians have professed that genitally driven erotic activity is not compulsory for being fully human and alive. Dueholm, like most mainline Protestants, overlooks the ancient Christian way in which celibacy, continence and chastity are ways of life that enable community and companionship free of sexual caprice.

Dueholm sounds like a pastor with a subtle, lively sense for the "heroic" possibilities of marriage. But a full Christian witness to the likes of Savage and his friends requires a wider range of responses than Dueholm offers. Monogamy sounds nice, but it is not the gospel; it is one, but only one, mode of faithful Christian witness. Dueholm's exhortation to monogamy remains at least somewhat captive to cultural notions of romance insofar as it is still premised on nearly everyone being in (or preparing for or living after) sexual partnerships.

Christopher C. Roberts
Philadelphia, Pa.

Sermonic repetition . . .

I've gone to church all my life, and I can tell Thomas Long why sermons bore me ("Why sermons bore us,"



Sept. 6). Too often hearing sermons is like repeating first grade over and over, with just variations on the same themes.

My husband was a pastor. When he died I went back to seminary and found to my amazement that the Bible could be exciting. I learned so much I had never known before in all my years of going to church. My daughter, who grew up with two parents who were pastors, is now going to the same seminary and also finding that excitement.

Jesus knew how to make his message relevant, often by telling stories which we remember to this day. Sermons don't have to be boring, but if they are, don't blame the listeners.

Clara Thompson
Montgomery, Ill.

Imperial ways . . .

In his essay "In the meantime" (Aug. 23), Richard J. Mouw supports his position regarding the American empire by reference to Abraham

Kuyper and Lesslie Newbigin, two theologians from other times and cultures. If he is not satisfied with *Resident Aliens*, by Stanley Hauerwas and William Willimon, he might consult *Out of Babylon*, by Walter Brueggemann (from his own Reformed tradition), *The Powers That Be*, by Walter Wink, or even *A People's History of the United States*, by Howard Zinn, which points out that in U.S. wars from the beginning the poor have gone out to fight on behalf of the rich.

An empire is still an empire with an empire's dirty tricks, in spite of pious lines such as "God bless America."

Daniel Hertzler
Scottsdale, Pa.

Text messages . . .

In "Yesterday's language" (Sept. 6), Gail Ramshaw ties together the texts of the forthcoming Roman Catholic rite and those used by many Protestant churches. Six years ago I wrote to Benedict XVI in a similar vein, suggesting that the new English texts approved by his office represent a sectarian attack on his own people and the rest of us, not unlike ones for which Protestants are justly criticized. The tragedy is that he knows better. He knows about the Logos, the importance of words, pastoral care and the catholic nature of the church.

We need to lament the fragmentation of our common life where legalistic fictions, in this case about language, trump theological and pastoral substance. We have here another instance in which the church has allowed the culture to hijack its wisdom and pastoral care. Many of us know better, but we seem incapable of acting wisely or pastorally.

Paul Westermeyer
St. Paul, Minn.

October 4, 2011

Ways of remembering

It's been said there are two kinds of suffering: one kind leads to more suffering, the other kind puts an end to it. The attacks of 9/11 were an instance of the first kind of suffering, for they quickly led to more suffering. They led, specifically, to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, in which hundreds of thousands of soldiers and civilians have been killed, including over 5,500 U.S. troops.

Just as there are two kinds of suffering, there are two kinds of remembering. One kind remembers wounds in a way that feeds the desire to inflict wounds on others. The other kind remembers in order to seek healing and a life beyond the suffering and the violence. Likely both kinds of remembering occurred during the recent ten-year anniversary of 9/11.

What if, after 9/11, the U.S. had engaged in dialogue about what it would take to make sure that its response to those evil deeds would further the cause of peace and reduce suffering? What if, instead of invading Afghanistan and Iraq, national leaders had worked with international partners to find the perpetrators of the crime and to bring them to justice? What if the U.S. had reached out to Muslims? What if 9/11 had made solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict a national priority? What if all churches had built relationships with mosques, and what if Christians and Muslims had worked on community projects together?

The nation was traumatized by the horrible deeds of 9/11. Those who work with trauma victims know that when the source of the trauma is violence, healing lies in breaking the cycle of violence and building bridges of peace between the parties that have been at enmity. This work involves risk, of course. But one thing 9/11 should have taught us is that the world can never be made risk-free and totally safe.

The central symbol of the Christian faith, the cross, is a symbol of suffering and violence. It embodies the second kind of suffering, for it stands for an act of sacrifice intended to put an end to sacrifice. Jesus endured an act of violence for the purpose of putting an end to violence.

And remembering the cross is, for Christians, an instance of the second kind of remembering. Christians gather in remembrance of the cross not to seek revenge or to fuel a desire for violence, but to become part of Jesus' own self-sacrificing ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation. Reclaiming that vocation is the church's way of remembering 9/11.

**Jesus endured an act of violence
for the purpose of putting
an end to violence.**

CENTURY marks

SCHOOLED IN LOVE: E. Glenn Hinson was asked to serve as interim pastor of a congregation that had forced out its previous pastor and experienced deep divisions. The members had heard that Hinson taught seminary courses on prayer, and they thought prayer was needed in their circumstances. In an early sermon he preached that there was hope for the church through agape—love. After the sermon a woman said to him, “Dr. Hinson, in this church we love one another; we just don’t know how to show it.” This convinced him that a congregation of flawed and fractious people should become what Bernard of Clairvaux desired a monastery to be, a *schola caritatis*—a school of love (*Weavings*, 26:4).

MORE TO THE STORY: A few years ago writer Alex Kotlowitz encountered a neatly dressed young woman named Dede. She remembered him well, but he

couldn’t place her. She had met him some 15 years earlier when he was writing *There Are No Children Here*, about the challenges of growing up in public housing projects. Dede had lived in public housing controlled by gangs; both her parents had trouble with alcohol; and she had been addicted to crack cocaine. Since that time, she had had a baby, started going to church and gotten married. Dede’s turnabout reminded Kotlowitz of the words of Nigerian-born novelist Chimamanda Adichie about “the danger of a single story.” We should not assume that we know the shape of another’s life just because she is poor and grows up in a ghetto (*chicagomag.com*).

LAWS FOR THE JOURNEY: If the Ten Commandments were written today they would probably be different, argues Old Testament scholar Terence Fretheim. He points out that Deuteronomy revises

the Ten Commandments recorded in Exodus: a wife is no longer listed as property and the neighbor is not necessarily male. The law was first given when the people of Israel were on a journey, and it became a compass for their wilderness wanderings. Over time their circumstances changed, and therefore the law had to change too. “Just because laws are from God does not make them unchangeable; the texts witness to a God who makes changes in the law,” so that God can be true to God’s own character and to the relational commitments made to Israel through changing times and places (*Word & World*, Summer).

MORALITY MATTERS: Derek Parfit is the most original moral philosopher in the English-speaking world, some claim, and his two-volume *On What Matters* has been touted as the most important philosophy work in more than a century. Parfit’s parents met in the Oxford Group in the 1920s and became medical doctors serving as missionaries in China. They both shed their faith on the mission field and returned home to England. Briefly a believer during his childhood, Parfit too became an atheist. Parfit views moral truth, however, like Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov viewed God: without moral truth everything would be permitted (*New Yorker*, September 5).

DON’T BET ON IT: Proponents of the gaming industry like to point out its benefits—tax revenues and new jobs—but fail to address the hidden costs of gambling to individuals, families, employers and society as a whole, including crime, lost productivity on the job, bankruptcy, suicide, illness, and marriage and family breakups. Besides the human cost, mathematician Earl L.



Grinols argues that the actual cost in dollars and cents can be established. Using a complex mathematical formula, he concludes that each pathological gambler costs society \$9,393 each year (*Christian Reflection*, No. 40).

FAITH MATTERS HOW? Recently Bill Keller argued in the *New York Times* that journalists need to ask tougher questions of politicians about their faith. In her *Time* blog, Amy Sullivan writes a rejoinder: they don't necessarily need to ask tougher questions but more relevant ones. Politicians, especially Republican ones, tend to use religion to connect with a certain audience, but they resist getting into specifics. The two main questions they need to be asked are: "1) Would your religious beliefs have any bearing on the actions you would take in office? and 2) If so, how?" Which decisions would be particularly shaped by their faith? On abortion and birth control? Economic policy and immigration? (swampland.time.com, September 2).

WHERE HELP IS SOUGHT: A *Newsweek* poll confirms that Americans are in a gloomy mood. Seventy-six percent think the country is on the wrong track, and 70 percent believe Americans were much better at solving problems 25 years ago. When asked who can best solve problems, people display an ongoing suspicion of big government, especially the federal government in Washington. Small business owners, state governments and governors, CEOs and local mayors are most capable of solving problems, according to the poll (thedailybeast.com, September 11).

BACK TO THE FUTURE: Local government officials in Hungary are handing state-owned schools over to churches because they are unable to afford their upkeep during the economic recession. A Hungarian weekly newspaper reported this summer that local councils had been forced to abandon schools in the face of shrinking state subsidies, heavy municipal debts and a decreasing number of children. "Churches are entitled to run schools in Hungary as public

“It's one thing to support the death penalty. To applaud it—especially Perry's abundant use of it—is sick.”

— Daniel McCarthy, editor of the *American Conservative*, on how Texas Governor Rick Perry was applauded by a sympathetic audience at the mention of the frequent use of the death penalty in his state [Twitter, September 7]

“No U.S. leaders dare to tell the truth to the people. . . . This is no normal recession. There will be no painless solution. 'Sacrifice' will be needed, and the American people know this. But no American politician dares utter the word 'sacrifice.' Painful truths cannot be told.”

— Kishore Mahbubani, a retired Singaporean diplomat, arguing that dictators are falling and democracies failing because they don't tell the truth [quoted by Thomas Friedman, *New York Times*, September 6]

service providers, receiving the same taxpayers' money as public sponsors,” said the ecumenical officer of Hungary's Reformed Church. The Reformed, Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches ran most schools in Hungary before the imposition of communist rule after World War II (ENInews).

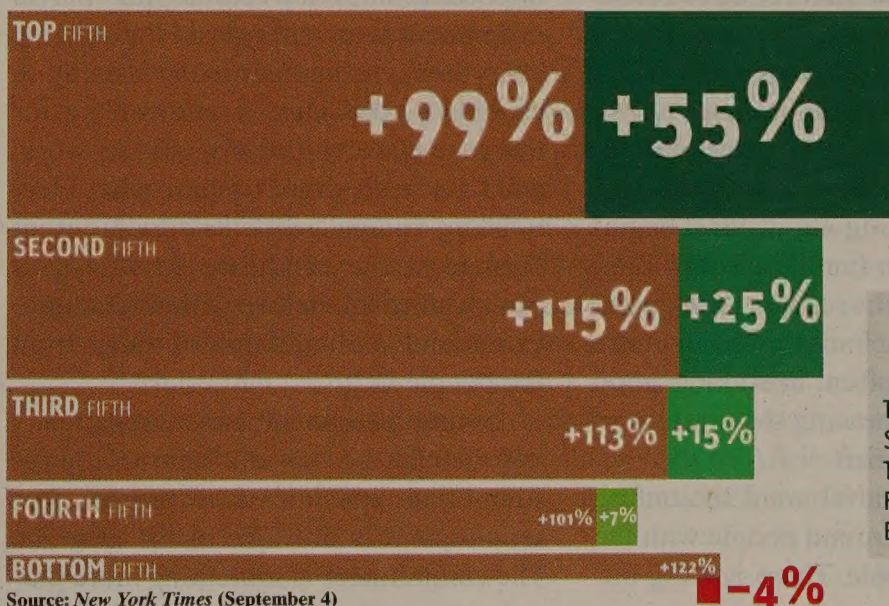
REALITY RELIGION? Jim Henderson, a 63-year-old self-proclaimed failed Christian pastor and “spiritual anthropologist” living in Seattle, believes he may have found his spiritual calling in reality TV. Henderson has developed a potential TV

show called “Save Me!” that would put passionate believers of different faiths under one roof. “Every day they go out individually and independent of each other to try and save people, and then they come home and try to save each other,” Henderson said in a casting call on YouTube. While Henderson is a Christian, he doesn't want “Save Me” to be a Christian show; he said casting would be open to Buddhists, Jews, Scientologists and atheists. Henderson spoke about the show six months ago with a Hollywood producer, who was intrigued by the idea (RNS).

U.S. INCOME GAINS (AND LOSSES)

1947–1979

1980–2009



Income ranges for each fifth in 2009:

Top fifth \$112K+
Second fifth \$73K–112K
Third fifth \$48K–73K
Fourth fifth \$27K–48K
Bottom fifth Below \$27K

Source: *New York Times* (September 4)

Do you love people?

by Peter W. Marty

THE LAST question the pastor asked was “Peter, do you love people?” He was interviewing me for my first parish assignment and was about 30 years older than I was. The question unsettled me. It seemed disingenuous. It felt like a patronizing trap. I think my reply to him was some variation of “You bet!” Whatever my response, it almost certainly displayed more eagerness than depth, more cheer than nuance. What I do remember is that I was annoyed by the inference that it was possible to be preparing for ordination in the church and yet be unloving of people.

This pastor judged me suitable for placement in a congregation. Perhaps I said “You bet!” with special gravity. Or maybe something else in the interview indicated potential. Whatever the case, the do-you-love-people question has never left my mind. It has been rolling around in my head now for a quarter century—and it’s the best thing that pastor could have asked me.

After peeling back the layers of that question, I have concluded that the only relationship worth having with a congregation is one that requires extensive use of the word *love* to describe its fullness. Yes, a love of people seems like the most obvious component in a parish pastor’s life. But it’s not. “Love in theory” is prevalent. We’re all experts at talking or theorizing about love, beginning with our own families. But in relationships with those we care most about, we remain clumsy in the exercise of love. We fail often, mistaking good intentions for embracing the mystery of that other one’s heart.

As a pastor, I never want to confuse the love of being around people with the actual love of people. There is a big dif-

ference between experiencing people and taking the time and energy to know the depth, intricacy and holiness of their lives.

Theological education cannot assume responsibility for teaching this love or the desire required for its expression. No curriculum can teach one how to love unlovable people who, by the way, are a part of every congregation. Seminarians are taught how to exegete scripture, not people. When students

We should not confuse interpersonal skills with having a heart for people.

finally get around to studying matters of practical theology, often late in their degree program, they are itching to discover the skills, tasks and functions that go with being a pastor. Having mastered biblical hermeneutics, they want to know how to hold a chalice and craft a budget.

What often surfaces in the all-important interview for a first parish assignment is an enthusiasm for utilizing everything one has learned in training. A candidate who says, “I am looking for the best place to put my gifts to work, and I am really eager to share what I feel to be my calling” will tell a very different field from the candidate who says, “I can’t wait to fall in love with this congregation and learn all kinds of things from the people in it.”

Loving people in a congregation—that would be all of them—requires something special of a pastor. The requirement is not love in the abstract. The commitment is something more par-

ticular than, say, a Chicago Bears fan loving all other Bears fans. So what is behind this pastoral desire to treasure other people and take their daily lives to heart? Here are my observations from years of ministry lived in the shadow of the question that was drilled into my heart: “Peter, do you love people?”

First, a pastor must decide that the people of his or her congregation truly matter—that they are worth the personal energy expended on their behalf.

This is more than putting up with people who consider the church their second home. It asks for the gift of compassion and a keenly observant eye for noticing. Parishioners have no way of convincing their pastor to care about them. Just as a sailor reads the wind or a surfer reads the surf, a pastor must read the contours of individual lives within a congregation.

I might ask myself, for example, “Am I interested in the complications that go with the daily routines of these people under my care? Do I really want to get to know them in more than a superficial way? Can I imagine the very different worlds they inhabit and tune into those worlds when I’m with them? Am I willing to care personally for them in the midst of all that might

Peter W. Marty is senior pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church, Davenport, Iowa, and author of The Anatomy of Grace (Augsburg Fortress).

preoccupy their minds, worry their hearts or delight their souls?" A pastor who can answer these questions in the affirmative is on the road to a meaningful partnership in ministry. In loving others we do not merely give of ourselves; we also receive energy and insight for living our own lives more fully. Long ago I decided that I am likely to learn more from the people in my congregation than they will ever learn from me.

Second, we need to love people as they are, not as we wish they were. None of this "if only" stuff in ministry. "If only she would buy into the strategic plan." "If only he would open his wallet more freely." Conditional love is not biblical love. Toleration of another is not the warmth of affection. If the ministry of a church is alive and vibrant, the members within it will always be in the process of becoming more than they presently are. This is its own delight. Pastors who enjoy a loving identification with their people will find themselves putting the joys and interests of these people ahead of their own. Everyone comes out on top when there is this "priority for the other." It sounds rather Jesuslike, come to think of it.

I have discovered a morning clue for detecting whether the day's ministry is calibrated in the direction of generous love or tedious function. If, when driving to work, I find myself thinking randomly about various people in our congregation with some excitement instead of pondering the tasks on a to-do list, chances are good that it will be a fulfilling day. It may also prove to be a very faithful day, at least in terms of rising to that calling I hold dearly before God.

Third, we should not confuse the gift of interpersonal skills with having a pastoral heart for people. Interpersonal skills are a key to good ministry, but they are no substitute for the reverence that goes with casting one's lot among this strange menagerie of people called a congregation. The art of embracing other people, including individuals very much unlike ourselves, does not belong to a bullet point on a pastor's job description. It is part of one's character, formed by

the grace of the Savior's love and molded through daily prayer.

Fourth, love is its own reward. It is not a means to an end. Love must never be exercised to get somebody to do something. As a pastor, I need to see people for the depth of their humanity, for the colorful surprise that God has tucked into their breath, and not for their perceived value to the church's ministry or to me personally. As Mother Teresa put it, "The success of loving is in the loving; it is not in the result of loving."

Fifth, love grows in depth over time. Just as those in a marriage enrich the texture of their togetherness with each new experience of their shared life, so we in the church discover the full meaning of our love for one another only over the course of time. If I say, "I love you," to another human being, I cannot really say this in a way that suggests I've perfected that love. Rather, the words remind both of us that there is yet more love to be discovered through our precious bond.

Finally, cherishing the people of a

The Belgian girl Adele Brisse sees the Madonna in the woods, 1858

Between a maple and a hemlock, she told people, the sort of detail That makes you believe she saw what she said she saw. There was A blinding light that slowly assumed form, she said. The Lady had Auburn hair, another one of those details that gives you the shivers. This first time the Lady did not say anything, only smiled radiantly, Which is precisely the sort of vision of the Madonna we would like, I suspect, all of us—an opening vision, a prelude, an initial meeting, To feel each other out. No one ever considers what She might think. She might be just as nervous and overwhelmed as the terrified child, You know? She might not be totally sure She's at the right visitation Site—is She supposed to be in Wisconsin, or somewhere in Borneo? Nor did She say a word when She appeared again between the trees. She must have been starving to touch a tree, after eighteen centuries. Wouldn't you be? Maybe an apparition isn't so much a message gig As it is Her bathing again for just a few moments in this wild world. Maybe when She visits us it is a gift to Her. Maybe She is desperate To smell coffee and manure and cottonwood and the musk of minks. The third time, five long months after the first two, early in October, Adele finally asked questions, sensibly beginning with who are you? And the Lady spoke gently and told her to start a school for children, Yet another detail that just reeks of truth to me—of course, a school! What better way to wake up kids' hearts than handing them wonder? The story then gets normal—Adele battles to execute the assignment, Becomes a nun, starts an order, today there's a shrine and a website, And the Lady has not yet reappeared between the maple and hemlock. But I keep thinking about the third apparition—it can't be an accident That She came in October. She might have wanted to sip woodsmoke, You know? Or savor the orange thrill of immense slumping pumpkins, Or see the steam rising from horses, or applaud the brave tired shocks Of corn. Perhaps She quietly spoke to every hawk while She was here. Perhaps that's why She was there, to meet with them before they flew South, and She was startled to discover Adele a third time by the trees. Perhaps the whole thing with Her three visits to Adele Brisse is a total Bizarre accident, and the hawks of Wisconsin tell it utterly differently.

Brian Doyle

congregation requires a deep, inner desire if it is to surface as a pastoral priority. Loving a body of people does not happen automatically or mechanically. There may be many days when one feels little love. We cannot order an emotion anymore than we can learn one from a textbook. So what do we do? The best forms of love are always driven by a thirst or a longing to know and care about another human being. Appetite or desire in the human condition is what educator and scientist Leon Kass believes is the key to the deepest principle of life. He proposes that it's our long-

ing or desire, not our DNA, that's the key to having a life at all. Where our soul may not feel a longing for God or for other people, there is always another option. We can "desire the desire" or, as Meister Eckhart once put it, "long for the longing."

Every pastor and congregation must find a relational path through challenge and hardship, through exhilaration and meaning. A certain complexity seems to accompany every love. But in the midst of this complexity, we might remember Thomas Merton's experience at a Louisville intersection.

He was suddenly seized by the notion that an extraordinary relationship existed between him and all the strangers he could see: "At the corner of Fourth and Walnut . . . I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs."

Pastors have the privilege of plugging in the names of the intersecting streets of their own church and longing for the same astonishing bonds within their congregations that Merton felt with those passersby on that Louisville street corner.

CC

Worshiping through the storm

Hurricane effect

by Heidi Neumark

MOST CHURCHES in the New York area closed down as Hurricane Irene approached. This made sense. We were in what the news reports called the "cone of uncertainty," so there was no way to know what the hurricane might bring on Sunday morning. The mayor ordered the shutdown of all New York City subway lines and buses. In many cases, the clergy themselves had no good way to get to church and wouldn't want to encourage their congregants to come out in unsafe conditions.

My circumstance was a bit different. I don't have to go outside to get to church; I just go down the stairs next to our kitchen. Besides, we have a shelter in our church for LGBTQ youth who are homeless. They had ridden out the storm inside, watching movies, listening to music and dancing in the church undercroft. Since several of them regularly attend worship, why cancel it?

Sunday morning dawned, and I was glad to see that the undercroft had not

flooded as it had a few weeks earlier during a heavy rain. The repair job held up. There was a mouse in the kitchen sink, but nothing else out of the ordinary. Things had not gone so well for a Saturday night shelter volunteer who

Noah and the ark. There were only five of us, but the children who came had never heard the story before, and it was exciting to share it with them. I read the story, we sang it and then they retold it using a wooden ark of mine.

In a small corner of Manhattan, we saw that God is creating life even in the midst of watery chaos.

drove down from New Haven, then received a call telling him that a tree had crashed through his apartment wall. He couldn't drive back because the highways were closed, so he prepared a delicious cake for after church.

I set up for the first service of the day, Wee Worship, just in case worshipers showed up. We usually follow the lectionary, but I decided to tell the story of

When the children came to the description of the dove, they asked me where the dove was. I showed them the dove painted on the side of the ark. That was not good enough. Leni took one of the toy rabbits and made it fly through the air, her makeshift bird teaching me to

Heidi Neumark is pastor of Trinity Lutheran Church of Manhattan.

see the world's possibilities anew. I was glad that I hadn't decided to stay home.


Eighteen showed up for the next service. My preaching text was the story of Moses and the burning bush. I was struck by the way that Moses looked and saw the bush, and then turned aside for a second look. It was in the turning aside that he began to realize God was up to something. I didn't know that a hurricane would force me to turn aside. On Sunday mornings I'm usually looking to see that everything is ready, battening down the cone of uncertainty and doing what has to be done for God, so I have scant time to pay attention to what God is up to. This Sunday was different.

It was wonderful to see Nick, whose new job requires him to work from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m. every Sunday. Thanks to the storm, his office had shut down and he could come to worship. Jobi came by during coffee hour. He had come the day before to tell me that he had just gotten an HIV-positive diagnosis and he wanted prayers. I asked him where he was staying. He hadn't heard anything about the hurricane despite the nonstop news and was planning to sleep on his usual bench with his umbrella. There was only an hour before the trains shut down—just enough time to give him a Metro Card and the address of a temporary storm shelter. He returned on Sunday to thank me. The shelter had been great, he said. He asked for more prayers, prayers I had time to say with him, and he joined us for cake and coffee.

A woman who said she didn't think any churches were open came in requesting prayers. She had a long list of concerns, and I had time to listen. I had time to pray. I had time to turn aside. A mom, dad and two children I'd never met came in. They were out on a posthurricane walk to see what the storm had done. The little girl had a feather and her brother had a small leafy branch, like the rabbit/dove had brought back to Noah. The parents told me that the children were baptized but had never been to church again. They were thinking about changing that. I told them about our opportunities for children and gave them our Wee Worship flyer. The father pointed to the phrase "Squirmer welcome!" and said, "That's for us!"

I introduced the children to Elmo the turtle, who hadn't had breakfast yet. The little girl asked if she could feed Elmo. She told me about the frogs she had seen in the country. I turned aside. I bent down. I listened. She waved goodbye to Elmo, and her parents said they'd be back next week.

I didn't turn aside to find a burning

bush, but I did see flickers of God at work. My prayers go out to all who have suffered flooding, injury and severe losses as a result of Irene. The hurricane visited a watery chaos upon an extensive region. But in a small corner of Manhattan, we saw that God is at work even in such difficult times, creating and sending out light in every direction. 

Matins

Awakened by the alarm-radio
all seems as other yesterdays
and the ebb of tide,
your absence, the grains of sand
beneath the foam, slowly, revealed.
This now of morning asks
for a response and
I have none.

After

There is an emptiness that goes beyond
the opposite of fullness,
an empty emptiness, if such may be—
holding a child of fullness,
the presence of an absence—
and the ache.

—0—

In the realm of nothingness
there are no boundaries.
Circumferences do not exist,
there is no middle.
Horizons are broad,
never reached.
The stillness frightens
yet calmness abides.
Unheard—harmonic sounds
linger, echo-like,
sensed as an undertow
in an ocean's depth
—a Siren's call.
In the realm of nothingness
there are no boundaries,
It is a birthing place.

John Petrenka

Catholics tune out bishops' voting guides

Every four years, the U.S. Catholic bishops publish a detailed statement about how Catholics should think about key political issues in light of church teachings. And every election cycle, activists on both sides of the Catholic political spectrum argue passionately about what the statement really means, whether it supports their position and why it needs to be overhauled if it doesn't.

But what if nobody actually reads it? A new poll of U.S. Catholics shows that just 16 percent have ever heard of the bishops' document, "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," and just 3 percent say they have read it.

Most worrisome for the bishops may be that three-quarters of those who were even aware of "Faithful Citizenship" say the document had "no influence at all" on the way they voted in 2008; 71 percent said it would have made no difference even if they had known about it.

Overall, just 4 percent of adult U.S. Catholics say the statement from the U.S. hierarchy either was a major influence, or would have been if they'd known about it.

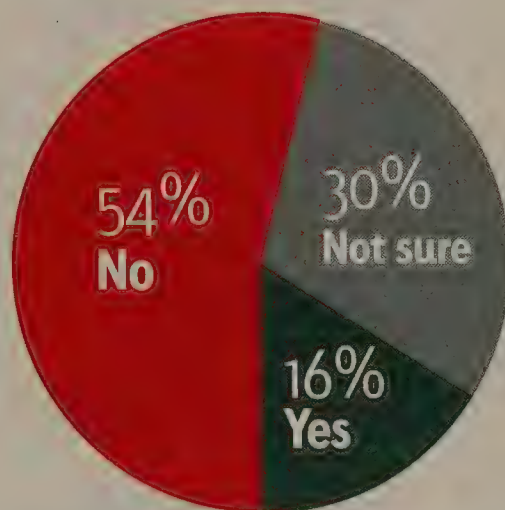
"Those who think the bishops have too much influence on Catholic voters may be relieved by these findings," said Peter Steinfels, codirector of Fordham University's Center on Religion and Culture, which sponsored the survey. "Those who think that the bishops have too little influence or have influence of the wrong sort may be distressed."

Steinfels presented the poll findings at a conference September 6 at Fordham's Manhattan campus which featured John Carr, a longtime staffer at the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops who has worked on "Faithful Citizenship" for the past 35 years. Also participating were Robert George, a leading conservative Catholic intellectual from Princeton University, and Stephen Schneek, direc-

tor of the Institute for Policy Research and Catholic Studies at the Catholic University and an influential liberal Catholic supporter of the Obama administration.

American Catholics are the ultimate swing voters, switching between Republican and Democrat alike. Representing approximately one in four U.S. voters, Catholics make up the largest single religious voting bloc in American politics.

"In 2008, do you recall hearing about this [Faithful Citizenship] statement?"



UNAWARENESS: A survey by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University found that more than half of U.S. Catholics had not heard about an election-year guide produced by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Carr said "Faithful Citizenship" has never been an actual voter guide like those put out by interest groups hoping to steer voters toward one candidate or another. In recent years, and most notably in the 2008 version, the 36-page document has focused increasingly on the larger principles at stake in elections and how Catholic voters should exercise "prudential judgments" in

choosing how to vote when none of the options is ideal.

Conservatives, however, have complained that such language is too vague and that the bishops should be more direct in telling Catholic voters that they cannot vote, for example, for a candidate who supports abortion rights.

Deal Hudson, president of Catholic Advocate and an adviser to Republicans on lobbying Catholic voters, is pressing the bishops to sharpen the language in "Faithful Citizenship" when they gather in November to vote on the statement.

"If the bishops republish the 2008 version of 'Faithful Citizenship' for the 2012 election—without changes—they will be providing Catholic voters another carte blanche to cast their vote for any pro-abortion candidate they want," Hudson and Catholic Advocate vice president Matt Smith wrote in an open letter to the hierarchy.

Observers say the bishops are unlikely to make substantial changes to "Faithful Citizenship" when they meet in November.

The status quo, however, may not please many liberals either. They often complain that the statement's focus on opposing abortion rights and same-sex marriage can provide an escape hatch for conservative Catholics who don't want to take into account other church teachings about caring for the needy, welcoming immigrants and providing adequate health care for all.

Whether any document could make a difference—even if more Catholic voters heard about it or read it—is an open question.

Catholics have gone from being a solid Democratic bloc in the days of John F. Kennedy (the first and only Catholic president) to a swing vote whose members are numerous enough to mean the margin of victory in key battleground states.

Catholic demographics are changing,

too, and each group within the church—from blue-collar whites to immigrant Latinos—has a different agenda. Moreover, the transformation is happening at a time when economic concerns trump all other issues.

All of which leaves Catholic voters as divided as any other segment of the American people. Carr opened the Fordham event by saying he was just happy to be out of Washington—"a more polarized, dispirited place you can't imagine." But, he added, "that polarization is creeping into our ecclesial life, I'm afraid." —David Gibson, RNS

Mouw hopes for compromise, connections in PCUSA future

Richard J. Mouw, president of Fuller Theological Seminary and current president of the Association of Theological Schools, has written about the importance of public civility as well as dialogue between Christians of differing views. In August he spoke in Minneapolis to a gathering of the Fellowship of Presbyterians, a group in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) who believe that the denomination has abandoned scriptural standards by, among other actions, deciding to ordain gay and lesbian ministers. The CENTURY spoke to Mouw about the Fellowship and its future.

Was the major topic of conversation in Minneapolis the recent vote by most presbyteries to delete the constitutional requirement of "fidelity in marriage, chastity in singleness" for ordaining church officers?

No. I think there was an underlying conviction that the real issues were much deeper. The discussions were about our commitment to what for many of us is the historic faith and confessional integrity within the Presbyterian context—the authority of scripture, how we interpret scripture and the uniqueness of Christ.

A number of Fellowship of Presbyterians organizers emphasized the desire

to be more focused on mission work. Isn't that still possible?

It's hard to do that when, at every meeting we go to, they are always fighting about some vote that's coming up. Many of us were very disturbed to learn that the Presbyterian Church in Mexico just broke relations with the PCUSA over the decision to ordain gay pastors.

What struck you as the most difficult dilemmas facing pastors?

A number of our [Fuller] graduates who are in positions of pastoral leadership are telling me that their people are very angry and want out. Those pastors are struggling with their own conscience: Will I continue to be a pastor to these people and go where they want to go, or is this a test of my leadership? Sadly, at the local level people are quietly leaving congregations because of their distress especially over the passage of the new ordination amendment.

Fellowship leaders planning to create a new Reformed denomination as a haven for conservative congregations have said that in recent years some discontented churches have been able—after negotiations with the PCUSA—to retain their property and transfer into another Presbyterian denomination. Aren't the financial considerations a major obstacle?

It's a big issue for both the PCUSA and for those who want to leave. For one thing, a lot of the churches that have left or would leave are very large congregations. They have been significant contributors to the coffers of the denomination. The big thing for people who think about leaving obviously is the property question.

In fact, wouldn't churches that depart be jumping from the frying pan into the fire—leaving arguments over sexuality and theology for legal and financial disputes?

We would hate to replay scenarios we've seen in the Episcopal Church such as the court fights over property in Virginia and the Los Angeles diocese. I actually once said to the L.A. Episcopal bishop: What if the diocese and its few dissenting congregations had gotten together and put all that money into HIV-AIDS orphanages in Africa and agreed to a gracious separation?



Richard J. Mouw

COURTESY FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

Some people who attended the Fellowship meeting may stay in the PCUSA because their geographical presbyteries are more evangelical-minded. But where does that leave conservative congregations in sharply divided regions?

Some are working on a new kind of presbytery system with different, separate ordaining bodies. Then there is this whole new idea of a kind of Reformed order—people taking vows of fidelity to traditional standards but still staying in touch with the larger church.

I really believe that what we need in our Presbyterian world is a revival of Reformed orthodoxy and missional church life, but also a renewal of connectionalism—this has been a very important motif in Presbyterian life. We are not congregationalists; we believe in mutual accountability of congregations.

Two top PCUSA officials, stated clerk Gradye Parsons and moderator Cynthia Bolbach, attended the gathering. The latter said the energetic discussions on "what's next" struck her as "good for the church." Is that a good sign?

We can't cut off conversations with those we disagree with. That happens on the left as well as on the right. I have a lot of good friends in the Presbyterian Church in America, the most conservative group. But people on the left don't want to have anything to do with them. We have a lot to learn from people with whom we disagree. I've learned a lot from the left about racism, gender equality and concern for the environment. The one thing that conservatives in the PCUSA must not do is go off into a corner.

Student of leadership tapped to take reins at Gordon College

For the past decade, sociologist D. Michael Lindsay has been living the very phenomenon he's studied: evangelicals climbing the ranks of secular institutions and becoming American elites. Yet in a surprise move, the 39-year-old has traded a tenure-track position at Rice University to become president of Gordon College, a respected outpost of evangelicalism in Wenham, Massachusetts, 25 miles north of Boston.

Some of Lindsay's former students have wondered why he would leave a highly ranked university with a growing, well-funded sociology department. For Lindsay, it's a matter of calling. "I know that I'm the right person for Gordon," Lindsay said, "because what I bring to the table today is what Gordon happens to need right now."

A Southern Baptist with Mississippi roots, Lindsay gained a national reputation with his 2007 book *Faith in the Halls of Power: How Evangelicals Joined the American Elite*. His broader research interest deals with leadership, and on September 16 he was inaugurated as the youngest leader in Gordon's 122-year history.

Though he's never been a college president before, Lindsay has spent countless hours talking with CEOs, big city mayors and even former U.S. presidents about their lives and work. His Platinum Study project, featuring interviews with 550 leaders in various fields, is said to represent the largest body of interview data ever collected from a cross section of American leaders.

He's also no stranger to helping institutions grow. He's built a reputation as a capable fund-raiser for numerous projects, including Rice's Program for the Study of Leadership, which he founded.

Lindsay plans to leverage both his experience and his power-packed Rolodex to help Gordon raise its profile. Starting October 14 in downtown Boston, he'll conduct a series of onstage interviews with corporate executives whom



RECENTLY INAUGURATED: *D. Michael Lindsay, 39, is the youngest person to become president of Gordon College in Massachusetts.*

he had interviewed for the Platinum Study.

While snagging Lindsay is a coup for Gordon, Paul Corts, president of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, hopes Lindsay can help galvanize interest in data collection and analysis across Christian higher education. "We want to take advantage of his background and skills," Corts said. "Research is increasingly important for us and our institutions. . . . So having people like this in our leadership will be very helpful to our whole movement."

If personal style is any indicator, Lindsay is apt to hold Gordon and Christian higher education to high standards. Lindsay expected all his research assistants to wear sharp business casual attire when working on his projects. If a student's cell phone ever rang during class, Lindsay would assess a \$5 fine to help pay for an end-of-semester party at his home.

"He was the only faculty member in the department who was always here every Saturday," said Elaine Howard Ecklund, who also teaches in Rice's sociology department. "When you're writing personal thank-you notes to everyone you meet in addition to doing your scholarly work, it means you put in a lot of hours."

On the Gordon campus, Lindsay's stately new office looks as if he hasn't had time to unpack. There's no dust, clutter or signs of work in progress—just books in shelves so high they require a ladder to reach.

Relaxed in pressed slacks and a patterned sport jacket, Lindsay smiles warmly as he talks about his three young daughters and his wife, Rebecca. He says he feels comfortable at Gordon, despite his young age and lack of experience in college administration. In his work, Lindsay said, he found that the most successful leaders are those "who found their talents and skills matched up with what was needed at a particular time at a particular organization."

Location, however, doesn't hurt. Boston, he said, "is where the world comes to study," and Gordon's location is an ideal place to build bridges between evangelicals and the broader community. "Because there's so much intellectual activity in Boston, there's an opportunity for conversation, for alliances, for collaboration that you just don't find in other places," he said.

In studying leadership, Lindsay says he's not pushing an evangelical agenda or "trying to help people who I like to get power or have influence or shape public policy." Instead, he's curious how effective leaders get to where they are and what helps them exercise good judgment over the long term.

Lindsay followed his mother, Susan Lindsay, from Catholicism to evangelicalism in his youth. At First Baptist Church in Jackson, Mississippi, an 11-year-old Lindsay committed his life to following Jesus. Though he's a Southern Baptist, Lindsay has also spent time in the Assemblies of God and the Christian and Missionary Alliance. And he sent his eldest daughter to a Jewish preschool.

Once he gets settled, Lindsay plans to teach sociology at Gordon and to stay active in sociological research. Meanwhile, some are hoping his career path will inspire more evangelicals to find their callings in Christian colleges.

"It's a very hopeful sign for Christian higher education that Gordon has been able to attract him," said Michael Beaty, a Baylor University philosopher who studies Christian higher education. "I'm hopeful that it means we're going to see an increasing number of senior administrators who return to Christian colleges and universities [after finding] success in secular academic institutions. But we'll have to wait and see." —G. Jeffrey MacDonald, RNS

Interfaith worship doubles in decade, but remains low

Interfaith worship services have doubled in the decade since the 9/11 attacks, according to a new study, even though more than seven in ten U.S. congregations do not associate with other faiths.

The survey released September 7 by an interfaith group of researchers found that about 14 percent of U.S. congregations surveyed in 2010 said they have engaged in a joint religious celebration with another faith tradition, up from 6.8 percent in 2000.

Interfaith community service grew nearly threefold, with 20.4 percent of congregations reporting participation in 2010, up from 7.7 percent in 2000, according to the Cooperative Congregations Studies Partnership.

After the 9/11 attacks, “Islam and [Muslim] presence in the United States [became] visible in a way that you couldn’t ignore,” said David A. Roozen, one of the report’s authors and the director of the Hartford Institute for Religion Research at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut.

National Muslim groups tried to build bridges to other faiths, whose members in turn “reached out in new ways to be neighborly,” he said.

Reform Jewish congregations led the way, with two-thirds participating in interfaith worship and three-quarters involved in interfaith community service.

The largest percentage of interfaith-worshiping congregations (20.6 percent) was in the Northeast, which is home to a disproportionate percentage of more liberal mainline Protestant churches. About 17 percent of interfaith-worshiping congregations are in a big city or older suburb, where greater diversity makes interfaith activity more likely.

The study implies that the more liberal a congregation, the greater likelihood for interfaith activity. Approximately half of Unitarian Universalist congregations held interfaith worship services, and three in four participated in interfaith community service. By contrast, among Southern Baptist churches, only 10 percent participated in interfaith community service and 5 percent in interfaith worship.

The study shows that most of the

11,077 congregations surveyed reported no interfaith activity, a finding that troubled pastor C. Welton Gaddy, president of Washington-based Interfaith Alliance.

“The reality in our nation now is we have a major problem with Islamophobia, and that fear is being fed by people in large enough numbers that we need probably ten times as many people involved in interfaith discussions and actions,” Gaddy said.

Even so, the fact that interfaith services and community projects have grown so much is something to celebrate, said Rabbi Marc Schneier, founder and president of the New York-based Foundation for Ethnic Understanding. “I’m not saying we are where we’d like to be, but the good news is the process has begun,” Schneier said.

“Outreach to the Muslim community from a Jewish perspective is now becoming in vogue. . . . Ten years ago, if I would have proposed anything like that, people would have thought I was from Mars.” —Piet Levy, RNS

College adds query on sexual orientation

An Illinois college affiliated with the United Church of Christ is poised to become the first school in the U.S. to ask prospective students about their sexual orientation. Elmhurst College, located west of Chicago, said an applicant’s decision to identify sexual orientation in the 2012–13 applications is entirely optional and is aimed at promoting diversity on campus.

“We ask a lot of question in admissions, so we thought, why not ask about this, too?” dean of admissions Gary Rold told the *Chronicle of Higher Education*. “We are trying to recruit students who are academically qualified and diverse, and we consider this another form of diversity.”

The question, located in the same section that asks students about their religious affiliation, asks: “Would you consider yourself to be a member of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) community?” Prospective students have the options of answering yes, no or “prefer not to answer.” Applicants who answer

yes are eligible for a minority scholarship that covers one-third of tuition.

The *Chronicle* said Elmhurst is the first institution to include sexual orientation on its admissions forms. Elmhurst says “our values and our vision are in line with those of the United Church of Christ,” which is one of the nation’s most progressive denominations and among the first to allow openly gay clergy and same-sex unions.

Elmhurst College is the alma mater of William R. Johnson, who in 1972 became the first openly gay man ordained as a UCC minister. Theologians Reinhold and Richard Niebuhr also were graduates of Elmhurst.

Young evangelicals split over same-sex marriage

It’s not news that young people are more liberal on issues like same-sex marriage, but a new poll charts just how deeply that split has been carved into the white evangelical community, one of the most socially conservative groups on the American religious landscape.

The poll, released in late August by the Washington-based Public Religion Research Institute, found that nearly half (44 percent) of young evangelicals between the ages of 18 to 29 favor allowing gays and lesbians to marry.

By contrast, the white evangelical community as a whole (even counting those relatively liberal young adults) is solidly opposed to same-sex marriage, by slightly more than 80 percent.

More broadly, the poll found “at least a 20-point generation gap between millennials (age 18–29) and seniors (65 and over) on every public policy measure in the survey concerning rights for gay and lesbian people.”

The poll also found that a slight majority of all Catholics (52 percent) favor same-sex marriage, despite the energetic teaching of their church to the contrary.

The PRRI poll confirmed findings from other polls over the past five years indicating that Americans have come to a tipping point on the issue of same-sex marriage: either equally divided or slightly in favor. —RNS

Poll: Muslim Americans lean to moderate views

Almost half the nation's estimated 2.8 million Muslims fault their leaders for not speaking out against Islamic extremists, but a vast majority are far more satisfied than Americans overall with the way things are going in this country, according to a major survey of U.S. Muslims.

The Pew Research Center report, termed the most comprehensive survey since 2007 at its release August 30, shows no evidence of rising support for Islamic extremism among Muslim Americans, although 52 percent say government antiterrorism policies single out Muslims for increased surveillance.

Nearly half of U.S. Muslims say their leaders have not done enough to challenge extremists. "I think we should all do more," says Hassan Jaber, executive director of Dearborn, Michigan-based ACCESS, the largest nonprofit Arab-American human services organization.

The survey shows that American Muslims have more moderate views than their brethren around the globe, yet 7 percent say suicide bombings are sometimes justified (unchanged since 2007) and 21 percent say there is a great deal or fair amount of support for extremism in their communities.

By contrast, four in ten Americans believe there is a fair amount of support for extremism among U.S. Muslims, and nearly one in five (24 percent) think Muslim support for extremism is increasing.

"They [U.S. Muslims] are mainstream and moderate in attitude," says Andrew Kohut, president of the Pew Research Center. "Most Muslims want to adopt American customs, many of their close friends are not Muslims, and they rate their economic situation pretty positively. They think like Americans."

Despite 55 percent saying that being a Muslim in the U.S. is more difficult since 9/11, Muslims are far more positive about the state of the nation (56 percent) than Americans as a whole (23 percent). Four years ago, there was more agreement on the state of the U.S.: 38 percent

for Muslims and 32 percent for the general population.

The poll found that most Muslim Americans still identify with or lean toward the Democratic Party and overwhelmingly support President Obama. —Haya El Nasser, *USA Today*

At Church of Beethoven, music is the message

"Music," Ludwig van Beethoven said, "is the mediator between the spiritual and the sensual life."

Transcending dogma, creed, culture and even language, music has the power to elevate the soul as well as the mind. It's the source of a type of faith that is as often discovered outside traditional organized religion as within it.

While spirituality and religion are not mutually exclusive, in the parlance of our time, music is "spiritual but not religious."

It's a paradox understood and embodied by the late classical cellist Felix Wurman, creator of the enigmatic Church of Beethoven, founded in an abandoned gas station on old Route 66 in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Wurman first convened the Church of Beethoven, a nondenominational Sunday morning meeting where music is the message, in 2008. It now has two more "congregations," in Durham, North Carolina, and in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago.

Oak Park is a progressive, artist-friendly community where the writer Ernest Hemingway and the iconoclastic architect Frank Lloyd Wright once resided—and where Wurman was raised. The Church of Beethoven held its first Oak Park meeting in an Italian trattoria nestled among some of the village's many art galleries, where music worshipers listened to a Bach cello suite and a poetry recitation before sticking around for brunch.

"It's a spiritual thing that doesn't necessarily have a specific religious thing, but it definitely touches the same chords in people," said Jean Lotus, one of the conveners of the Oak Park Church of

Beethoven. "I felt like this is the kind of thing you can do that can bring people together. It can make people have a sort of spiritual, uplifting experience. And the poetry actually does put ideas into words."

Calling the gathering a "church" is not intended to be disrespectful to traditional faith communities, some of which bristled when the music-as-worship services began in New Mexico and North Carolina.

"We're not declaring war on religion or anything like that," said Lotus, who is Catholic and regularly attends mass with her family of seven. "Not all people go to church. I do. . . . On Church of Beethoven days we go to an early mass and then go to the Church of Beethoven."

Wurman's sister, Candida Wurman Yoshikai, convener of the Durham Church of Beethoven, said her brother was not traditionally religious.

The idea behind the church was to have a house of worship where "music was a principal element and not just an afterthought," she said. "Felix was always trying to understand," Wurman Yoshikai said. "But he wasn't interested in organized religion, and it's fair to say that he was put off by it. At the same time he



TOUCHING A CHORD: The name of Beethoven (whose bust is pictured) is attached to a spiritual-but-not-religious gathering where music is the focus.

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wanted to bring music and its spiritual connection to people—the depth of something that can move us at a really deeply profound level.”

Just as silence forms the central element of worship in a Quaker meeting, in the Church of Beethoven the music is the worship, the homily and the anchor of the community of believers, if you will.

Wurman’s concept for the Church of Beethoven, where the music itself is the preacher, reminds me of a favorite spiritual quote, often attributed to St. Francis of Assisi: “Preach the gospel; when necessary, use words.”

The son of pianist and composer Hans Wurman, an Austrian Jew who escaped the Holocaust and immigrated to Chicago, Felix Wurman received his first cello when he was seven years old and began performing publicly at age 12.

“When Felix was dying, he told me, ‘I was definitely handed something,’” Wurman Yoshikai said. “He was very brilliant. We’re all in music, but he was really gifted.”

With his chamber group, Domus, Wurman sought to bring classical music to folks who weren’t familiar with it or didn’t have the means or the will to purchase tickets for the symphony or opera.

It was in the spirit of those early Domus performances that Wurman founded the Church of Beethoven. Musically speaking, the church is non-denominational. It may be named for Beethoven, but the music offered isn’t limited to the German composer.

Beethoven, who was raised Catholic and composed many religious works during his lifetime, including the great Mass in C Major and *Missa Solemnis*, seemed to find his greatest spiritual connection in the music itself.

As her brother’s legacy, Wurman Yoshikai hopes the Church of Beethoven will spread, creating more musical congregations across the nation and the world where those of no faith (or any faith) can find sacred community and spiritual connection.

“Don’t only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets,” Beethoven said. “Art deserves that, for it and knowledge can raise men to the Divine.” —Cathleen Falsani, RNS

Czech government will turn over seized churches

A PROMINENT Czech church leader has welcomed an agreement that would allow churches to reclaim land and buildings seized under communist rule but would require them to forfeit state subsidies in return.

A draft settlement was finalized in Prague on August 25 that allows religious groups to retrieve assets that were confiscated after the 1948 communist takeover, while obtaining financial compensation for others.

“The ball is now in the government’s court to prepare the necessary legislation,” said Joel Ruml, chairman of the Czech Ecumenical Council and a member of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren.

Ruml said the restitutions—expected to begin in January 2013—would

particularly affect the Roman Catholic Church, the nation’s largest denomination, which lost the most under communist rule. However, he said all denominations would have to prepare for the gradual end of state support in a country where clergy salaries have been paid by the state since the 18th century.

“Although we’ve dreamed for years of becoming free from the state, this will pose a great challenge,” said Ruml, whose council represents 11 Christian denominations, including Catholics as associate members. “Many church members are used to state support, and will need to be shown how this new situation offers opportunities for stabilizing our position and opening society to our work.” —ENInews

People

■ **Daniel Vestal**, the executive coordinator of the Atlanta-based Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, has announced that he will retire next year after 15 years in that position. Vestal informed the Baptist organization’s advisory council of his decision at its regular September meeting. The former pastor and native Texan said he is not planning to leave the ministry. After his unsuccessful bid to become president of the Southern Baptist Convention in 1990, Vestal convened a meeting of disenfranchised moderates that led to formation of the CBF a year later. Vestal was elected CBF coordinator in 1996 as successor to founding coordinator Cecil Sherman.

■ **Isaac Newton Farris Jr.**, a nephew of Martin Luther King Jr., has been named as the new leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Farris, 48, was elected August 15 to lead the Atlanta-based organization. A lifelong member of Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, where his uncle preached, Farris had served as interim president. He succeeds Howard Creedy Jr., who was tapped earlier this year but died unexpectedly July 28.

Farris said the organization’s primary focus will be on access to higher education.

■ Retired Bishop **Walter C. Righter**, who won a heresy trial paving the way for gay clergy in the Episcopal Church, died September 11 at age 87 near Pittsburgh. Righter was bishop of the Diocese of Iowa from 1972 until he retired in 1988. He later served as assistant bishop in the Diocese of Newark, New Jersey, under Bishop John Spong from 1989 to 1991. Righter became a flashpoint for tensions over the inclusion of gay people in ministry. Bishops in ten Episcopal dioceses in 1995 filed charges against him for holding doctrines contrary to church teachings because he ordained Barry Stopfel as a deacon and because he advocated the ordination of noncelibate homosexuals. In support, 36 bishops said that if Righter was found guilty and sentenced, “we will accept his sentence as our own.” In May of 1996, charges were dismissed as a church court ruled 7–1 that Righter’s action did not violate church law or “core doctrine.” Presiding Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori said, “His ministry will be remembered for his pastoral heart and his steadfast willingness to help the church move beyond old prejudices into new possibilities.”

LIVING BY The Word

Sunday, October 9

Philippians 4:1–9; Matthew 22:1–14

IF YOU WRESTLE with this Matthean parable through the night, it'll leave you limping by morning. Martin Luther didn't like preaching on it, and worshipers in early October won't be in the mood for its judgment. While this teaching occurs as Jesus travels to the cross, we worshipers are still a long way from Holy Week observances. Our minds are on football games, Oktoberfest fun and Halloween costumes. We're having too much fun to gnash our teeth. But the odd gift of the lectionary is that it does not give us the freedom to avoid difficult scripture, nor does it give us total control over passages that refuse to be tamed by our interpretative tools. To mix things up even more, we are presented with Paul's glorious hymn of praise in Philippians. How do we always "rejoice in the Lord" who casts an invited guest into the outer darkness?

Those who view the Christian life through the lens of God's final judgment and divide the world into those who are blessed and not blessed may not find this parable a struggle. But I'm a theological wrestler on this one. While we might be able to "Bible study" our way through the initial allegory of the first invited guests as the people of Israel who killed the prophets and rejected God's work of salvation in Jesus, while we might understand the slaves as Christian missionaries and the newly invited ones as the gentile community, and while we might see the destruction of Jerusalem smoldering in the background, we still have to explain the guest who is pulled in off the streets at the last minute and later kicked out of the party for not wearing the proper wedding clothes. How can we understand this failure of grace in what seems to be an amazingly open party of God?

Calvin and others have taught that the one ejected from the banquet represented the one who did not "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 13:14 and Gal. 3:27). We are all invited to the kingdom, but we are all under obligation to be clothed with Christ and to live lives of righteousness.

Sermons have been preached on this parable with the message that only practicing Christians are saved—everybody else is toast. Imagine that an active member in a congregation has just heard that sermon. She has tears in her eyes. She hears the judgment loud and clear. Her son-in-law is a self-proclaimed atheist and her granddaughter is unbaptized at age six. She has a wonderful neighbor who is Jewish; her longtime doctor is the best listener in the world—and a practicing Hindu. It turns out that she loves a lot of people who are going to hell. How can she be happy in heaven without them? She was told once that heaven

will be so incredible that she won't miss these people, but she can't imagine rejoicing in the Lord under these conditions. She can't imagine her sweet grandchild in hell.

But the grandmother has accepted the invitation; she's put on Christ and considers herself clothed with righteousness. She has recommitted herself on many occasions to imitating Christ. So what would Jesus do, she wonders. The congregation rises to sing a hymn rejoicing in salvation, and worshipers dutifully recite the Apostles' Creed. The grandmother's voice catches on the words of faith, "he descended into hell." She's never had a satisfactory explanation of what Jesus was doing in hell between his death and resurrection. For her at that moment, after suffering through a sermon that sent her loved ones to outer darkness, she knew what the creed meant for her. Before he was raised from the dead, Jesus went to retrieve those who had not heard the gospel through no fault of their own. Jesus went to get those cast into outer darkness and bring them into the kingdom with him. If she was clothed with Christ, she reasoned, she was called to be like him.

By the time of the final hymn she decided that to really be like Christ, she would pass up heaven in order to comfort her grandbaby in hell. She would offer her eternal life for her grandchild's eternal life. She would descend into hell as Jesus did. She left church convinced that day that if we truly live a transformed life, we can't stand by and feast while others starve and burn. That just isn't the Jesus way!

Parables work best when we allow them to interpret us.

Wise teachers of the Bible often counsel us that parables work best when we stop working so hard to interpret them and instead allow them to interpret us. I don't know if this imaginary woman has a heretical or an orthodox understanding of this parable. I don't know what a right interpretation of this parable is, to tell the truth. But I know that any way we go at it, it's a wrestling match and that every preacher and hearer who takes it on comes away limping from the effort.

What is amazing is that the woman took the parable as a challenge to take her clothing in Christ with all seriousness. She took it so seriously that she was transformed from one who understood herself as saved and going to heaven to one who gave up heaven in order to save and protect those she loved. Isn't this what Jesus did and what Jesus would do? Orthodox interpretation or not, the parable interpreted her life, and she found herself exiting worship with a slight limp but rejoicing nevertheless.

Reflections on the lectionary

Sunday, October 16

Matthew 22:15–22

I LIVE IN A PART of the country where the five-letter word *taxes* is often used as a four-letter word. Folks around here are highly skeptical of government even as they say we have the best government in the world. The people of first-century Palestine had greater reasons to be on the edge of revolt; they were taxed not by a government they'd elected but by an empire that occupied their land. The parties of the Pharisees and Herodians pushed Jesus on a sensitive issue with their "gotcha" question: Is it lawful to pay taxes to the emperor or not? They wanted to corner Jesus as the programmed loser, but his famous words of wisdom were a game changer: "Give therefore to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's."

I prefer the word *image* for the word that is sometimes translated as *head* or *likeness* of Caesar on that tax money. *Image* is better because it makes the connections in Jesus' response much clearer. Caesar had an imprinted image on Roman coins, and God has an imprinted image too—on us. All creation bears God's image because God is the Creator of all things including the human man Caesar. When we give to God things that are God's, there isn't anything left to give to anyone else. It's all God's!

As God's people we bear the image of God. We have God tattooed on our foreheads and on our hearts. But amazingly, this isn't a one-way street. Isaiah once described God's deep connection and love for us by asking, "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands" (Isa. 49:15–16).

God has a tattoo! Isaiah imagines our likeness tattooed on the palm of God's hand. Both Creator and creatures are tattooed with the other's image; we carry each other's pictures around in our wallets. We know that whether it's body art or pictures in our wallets, these symbols are reserved for those we dearly love. These are the ones to whom we are bound by covenants and kinship. There's a deep foreverness about our relationships.

Note how small and insignificant Caesar becomes up against the Creator. Note how puny his empire and his image are up against God's greatness. Note how glaring his lack of compassion for his subjects when he's up against a God described as a nursing mother whose baby's face is already tat-

tooed on the palm of her hand. Render to God the things that are God's.

Matthew 22 is about taxes; it's about what belongs to God and what obedience to God (rather than to tax law) looks like. Because Creator and creatures are imprinted with each other's image, likenesses are held in common. In humble obedience we are called to look like God in what we do and what we say. The fact that the trick question of the day has to do with governments and taxes leads us to reflect on how we Christians exercise our ultimate allegiance to God in the arenas of politics and government. Any expectation that life can be neatly divided into pigeonholes of sacred and secular, public and private, doesn't hold true in God's economy. This does not work in a world where everything belongs to God.

What does it mean for our obedience to God to be greater than our obedience to anything else? What does it mean for the cross to take central place amid all other pledges of allegiance? In the opening decades of the 21st century, there is a lot of discussion about the role of government and much discernment about the mission of the church.

As beings created in the image of God we bear a resemblance to God in our compassion for others. We are to

The people of faith have God's DNA of compassion imprinted on them.

attempt to be a striking likeness to Jesus and what he would do. As the baptized, we view the world and judge the actions of others through this lens of compassion. Governments, even so-called Christian governments, act not out of compassion but out of constitutions. We have seen both foreign and domestic governments formulate laws or policies that are perfectly legal and yet are unjust because they create victims. What is legal is not always compassionate. What is law-abiding is not always justice-making. Many of us dream of a community where governments view the world through the lens of compassion, but Caesar will always be Caesar, even in a great democracy.

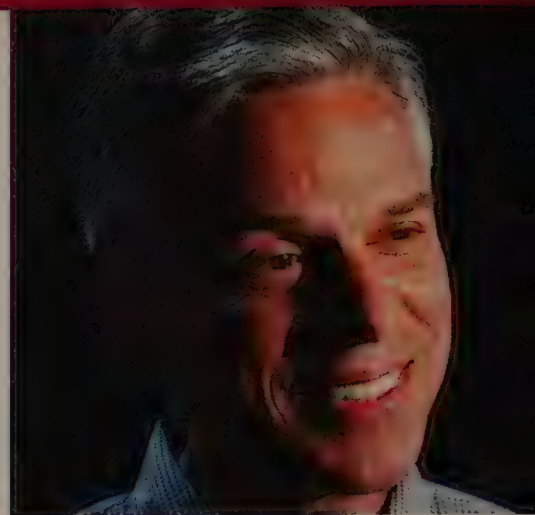
That's why the people of faith who give their ultimate allegiance to God, and who have God's compassionate DNA imprinted on their spirits, bear witness to this mercy and advocate for it everywhere. In this way we continue to give to God the things that are God's.

The author is Mary W. Anderson, who is pastor of Incarnation Lutheran Church in Columbia, South Carolina.

A 'model minority' blends in

Normal Mormons

by Jana Riess



THE PUBLIC AFFAIRS department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints recently noted an uptick in the media's use of the word *cult* to describe Mormonism, even in august publications such as the *New York Times* and the *Economist*. It is probably not coincidental that two Mormons, Mitt Romney and Jon Huntsman, are running for president.

The peculiar place of Mormonism in American culture was made even more evident in a comment by Fox News host Ainsley Earhardt. Speaking in July with two other commentators about the presidential chances of Texas governor Rick Perry, she said she expected that Perry would be able to raise money from the conservative base of the Christian Coalition, especially "with Romney obviously not being a Christian." Her cohosts murmured their assent, as if it were obvious that the Mormon Romney is not a Christian.

That Romney and Huntsman are Mormons is a huge stumbling block to their candidacies. Polling in June by the *Los Angeles Times* revealed that at least one in five Republican voters said that on principle they would not vote for a Mormon for president. An even higher number of Democrats—27 percent—claim that they would not support a Mormon.

It's not just in the arena of politics that people are suspicious of Mormons. In their 2010 book *American Grace*, sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell revealed that Mormons rank as the third-most-hated religious group in America, after Muslims (no surprise) and Buddhists (a major surprise). The study's findings also showed, however, that suspicion of minority religions decreases significantly when people have personal interactions or friendships with members of those religions. A conservative evangelical soccer mom may claim to despise Mormonism, but her qualms tend to lessen when she becomes friendly with a Mormon co-worker or neighbor.

Therein lies a problem: unfamiliarity. A 2009 LDS-sponsored study indicated that nearly half of Americans understand next to nothing about Mormons, and many have never known a Mormon personally.

On the other hand, as increasing numbers of Mormons move out of traditionally Mormon-dominated areas in the western U.S., Mormonism should become more accepted and mainstream. The LDS Church has attempted to further that trend with its "I'm a Mormon" ads. The ad campaign began with the church opening its website to members worldwide, inviting them to upload home videos describing themselves and their beliefs. It

was an unexpectedly democratic move for a religion that tends to favor top-down authority and a centralized single message.

In June, the church expanded the PR campaign to include "I'm a Mormon" billboards in New York and other cities. This campaign will reach more cities this fall. The ads, which aim to show the racial and ideological diversity that exists in the LDS Church but is not always apparent to outsiders, appear to be working: the church has reported a significant boost in visitors

Mormons today are likely to stress the value of their distinctive lifestyle.

to its website. The ads also seem to have the desired effect of thawing chilly receptions of Mormon missionaries in the cities where they have been launched. The theme of the ads may be described as, "We're normal—in fact, we're just like you!"

But can Americans expand their definition of normal to include a religion that seems so different doctrinally than the forms of Protestantism and Catholicism they're used to? Evangelical Christians, in particular, have been aggressive about pointing to the differences between Mormon and mainstream Christian beliefs. For example, during his 2008 campaign, Mike Huckabee suggested that Mormons believe that Jesus and Satan are brothers. In May, writing at Patheos.com, evangelical pastor Warren Cole Smith declared that any candidate who supported a "false and dangerous religion is unfit to serve," adding that a Romney presidency would "normalize the false teachings of Mormonism the world over."

The editorial elicited more than a thousand comments, testifying to the polarizing nature of Mormon beliefs. Some of Smith's fellow evangelicals expressed their deep suspicions of Mormonism, seeing it as a wolf in sheep's clothing, while true-blue Mormons chimed in and smugly asserted a monopoly on religious truth. Atheists and agnostics expressed a snarky won-

Jana Riess teaches at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Her books include *What Would Buffy Do?* and an abridgment of the *Book of Mormon* with commentary.



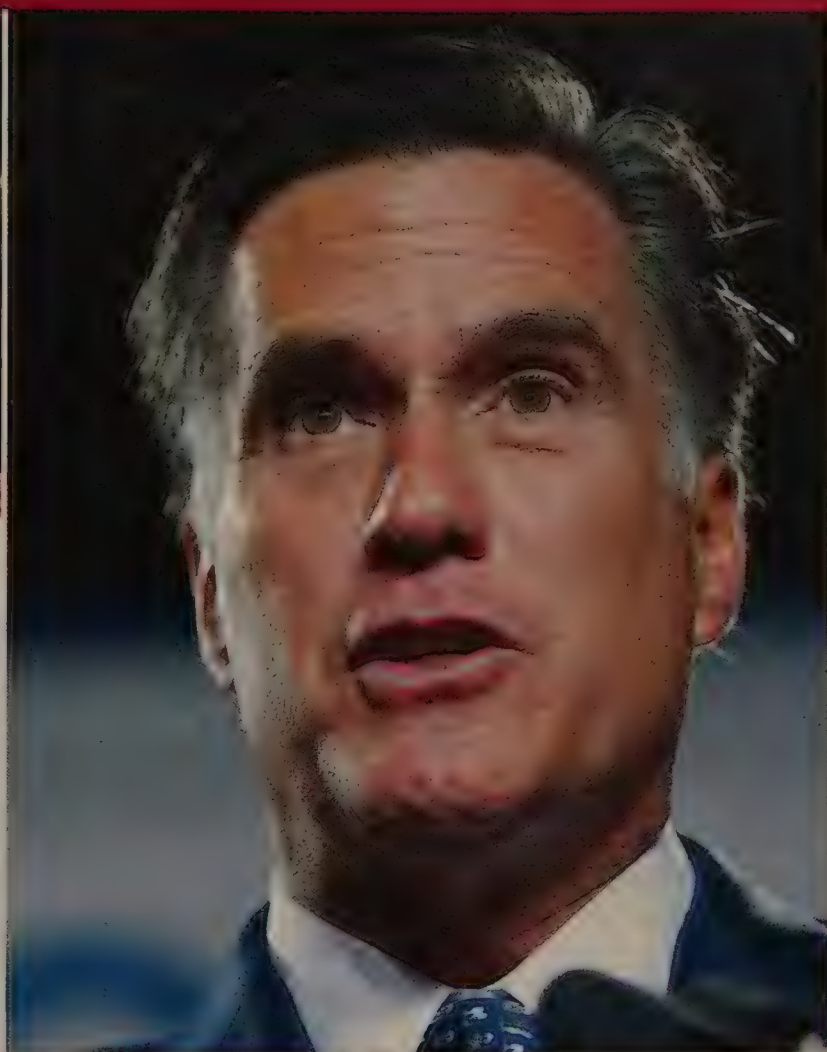
derment that anyone could subscribe to a religion claiming that a man rose from the dead—and compounded such a fabrication with additional whoppers involving golden plates and the perils of tea drinking.

Many of Mormonism's critics fail to appreciate the ways that Mormon theology has changed through the years, often by way of the guidance that the LDS president claims to receive from God through "continuing revelation." (The teachings of a previous era are almost never explicitly repudiated, however.) For example, the doctrine that African Americans bear the "curse of Cain" is certainly not LDS doctrine today, though it was in the days of Brigham Young.

Some theological teachings are more opaque. For example, Mormon theology has traditionally dictated that human beings will become gods and that God himself was once human. An apparent disclaimer of this early Mormon teaching came when LDS prophet Gordon B. Hinckley appeared on *Larry King Live* in 1998 and, when asked whether Mormons believe that God was once a man, answered, "I wouldn't say that." He had given similarly vague denials the previous year to reporters from *Time* and the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

But what one LDS leader says to the media is not as reliable a gauge of the changing winds of LDS theology as the wording used in the LDS Church's twice-annual General Conference, when many worldwide Mormon leaders address the faithful by satellite or streaming Internet. In that forum, it's been rare to hear leaders talk about godhood recently unless they are quoting earlier leaders on the subject—and even that happens less frequently than it used to.

An investigation of the official LDS website confirms this trend. From 2006 to 2011, the word *godhood* appeared only ten times in official General Conference talks, church magazines and manuals. Of those cases, two quoted former LDS prophet Spencer W. Kimball about human beings becoming gods; one quoted former prophet David O. McKay on the subject; one cited midcentury leader Hugh B. Brown; and two drew from former apostle Marion G. Romney (a cousin of George Romney, Mitt's father). Two others referred to the "godhood" of Jesus Christ. Only one magazine piece—written anonymously—asserted that human beings "have within us the seeds of godhood," while an article about recovering from romantic breakups mentioned godhood twice as a goal for righteous human beings. Interestingly, that article was not written by a high-ranking international leader.



MORMON FACES: (clockwise from top left) Former Utah governor and current Republican presidential candidate Jon Huntsman; cast members from HBO's fictional Mormon-themed drama *Big Love*; former Massachusetts governor and Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney; members of the Mormon Tabernacle choir performing in Salt Lake City.

CLOCKWISE FROM UPPER LEFT: AP PHOTO / ELISE AMENDOLA, COURTESY OF HBO, AP PHOTO / JULIE JACOBSON, AP PHOTO / DOUGLAS C. PIZAC

By comparison, church talks and materials from the 1970s and 1980s employed the concept freely in relation to the eternal destiny of men and women. As then-prophet Spencer W. Kimball said in 1976, “Our Heavenly Father has a plan for man’s growth from infancy to godhood.”

Does that mean that Mormons no longer believe that they can become gods? It is difficult to say. Many Mormons no longer think about the topic at all; it has become an insignificant aspect of contemporary theological expression. The idea may someday fade away, just as the church’s encouragement of plural marriage—once a cornerstone not just of Mormon practice but of its belief system—has faded away.

There’s no question that Mormon theology is subtly changing. The real question is how far it will bend to accommodate its host culture and where will it seek to reestablish its distinctiveness. Historians such as Jan Shipps, Thomas Alexander and Kathleen Flake have argued that whenever Mormonism has had to give up something central in order to assimilate into American culture, it has tended to compensate by hardening its position in other areas. For example, when polygamy was jettisoned in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Word of Wisdom (the Mormon dietary code that eschews coffee, tea, alcohol and tobacco) assumed a position of prominence. Early generations of saints had adopted a relaxed view of the Word of Wisdom, as is evident in the sanc-

tioned presence of wine at early Mormon temple dedication ceremonies, the appearance of coffee on the list of required provisions for saints undertaking the arduous journey west to Utah, and Brigham Young’s decades-long struggle to stop chewing tobacco. But once polygamy was disavowed, the Word of Wisdom became one of the most important markers of LDS identity.

In 1906, the wine of the LDS sacrament (communion) became water in a nod to the broader U.S. temperance movement, and by 1921 strict avoidance of coffee, tea, alcohol and tobacco had become not just recommended but required for Mormons seeking entrance to the LDS temple. Coincidentally, Mormons expanded their temple-building efforts abroad, began emphasizing Joseph Smith’s “First Vision” and underscored the unique revelatory role of the LDS prophet. It’s not that these elements were absent from Mormon theology and practice before the disappearance of polygamy, but that they were rarely front and center.

Mormon history has always revealed a tension between adapting to the surrounding culture and emphasizing distinctiveness. In the past 30 years, Mormons have become more like evangelical Protestants in their political leanings (approximately 65 percent of Latter-day Saints in the U.S. identify themselves as Republicans) and even in their theological formulations. There is far more emphasis on grace and on Christ’s atonement among Mormon leaders today than there was two

generations ago. However, Protestant and Catholic critics are correct when they say that Mormonism remains theologically distinctive. For example, Mormons reject creedal Christians’ doctrine of the Trinity as “extrabiblical.”

Mormons today are likely to stress their distinctiveness in the area of personal and family values. Even those who criticize Mormon theology often express a grudging admiration for the LDS Church’s focus on family, teetotaling, tithing and missionary service. Mormon spiritual practices serve as bridge-builders even when doctrine is a point of contention. It’s not difficult to imagine that some doctrines that have been the greatest sources of division are going to go the way of spotted owls even as the unique Mormon lifestyle continues to win praise.

To some extent this transformation is already occurring. During the very same summer that voters were scrutinizing Romney’s Mormonism and finding it wanting, American popular culture fairly exploded with what the media called a “Mormon moment,” which presented Mormonism in a generally positive light. The cheeky *Book of Mormon* musical found itself the toast of Broadway and

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brought home nine Tony awards; *Newsweek* published a story titled “Mormons Rock!”; and freshly returned Mormon missionary Elizabeth Smart was lauded for her evolution from kidnapping victim to mature, committed activist—a development she credits to her LDS faith.

Mormons now find themselves in the familiar situation of being on the defensive theologically and politically, but at the same time they are in terra incognita: they are not only a tolerated sect but are viewed as a model minority leading the way in preserving family values. When a group is held up as a model minority, it tells us as much about what the host culture needs as about the minority itself.

Mormonism’s new cultural role is apparent in the profane but charming *Book of Mormon* musical (which, for the record, I saw in previews and found hilarious). Some Mormons have been anxious to clarify that the musical is not really about Mormons but about American culture’s idea of Mormons. Historian Richard Bushman recently compared the production to visiting a funhouse Hall of Mirrors at a carnival: you can recognize yourself, yet it’s not really you. He is quite correct about that—but the distortion itself is instructive.

Probably the most theologically flawed song in the production is “Spooky Mormon Hell Dream,” in which a missionary who has abandoned his companion succumbs to the guilt he feels for breaking the rules and failing in his mission. The lyrics posit a Dantean inferno for the Mormon reprobate: “Down, down to Satan’s realm / See where you belong / There is nothing you can do / No escape from Spooky Mormon Hell Dream.” Lucifer is there in the Mormon hell, and Catholics and Jews are his minions. Elder Price finds himself confessing his “awful” sins (failing as a missionary, stealing a donut as a child) to his fellow travelers in this nightmarish afterlife: Genghis Khan, Adolf Hitler and Jeffrey Dahmer.

The song is side-splittingly funny, and it’s augmented by sight gags, like a pair of giant dancing Starbucks cups that represent the terrible temptation of coffee. The coffee part is at least accurate. The worldview mocked by the rest of the song is a fiction: Mormons don’t believe in any sort of eternal hell that resembles the one depicted in the song. In fact, one of the sticking points between LDS theology and mainstream creedal Christianity is Joseph Smith’s near-universalism and his emphasis on the three levels of paradise that the vast majority of humanity will find themselves in after the final judgment. A popular Mormon folk story features Smith’s teaching that even the lowest kingdom in

heaven is a paradise so divine that anyone who caught a glimpse of it would be tempted to commit suicide to get there sooner. The story is probably apocryphal, but the spiritual point hits home: in the Mormon cosmology, almost everyone attains some version of heaven, even adherents of other religions.

Yet the song’s existence illustrates what the host culture now requires. Throughout history, the reasons that Mormonism has been vilified have changed according to the anxieties of the day. In the 19th century, Latter-day Saints were excoriated for an allegedly lascivious sexuality. Mormon men were depicted in cartoons and antipolygamy fiction as sexual predators whose libidos knew no bounds. In the early 21st century, members of the same religion are portrayed as being sexually repressed. The creators of *The Book of Mormon* production apparently also need them to believe in a sinners-in-the-hands-of-an-angry-God variety of eternal punishment. In a strange way, Mormons have become the cultural arbiters of morality: the musical critiques LDS teachings on homosexuality even while showing Mormons to be some of the sweetest people you’ll ever meet.

The story of what happens next in Mormonism’s careful negotiations with American culture is unwritten, but the past suggests that the church will bend for the sake of assimilation. With two Mormon candidates running for president and Romney among the front-runners, such negotiations have high political stakes.

“We never want to go back to normal.”
— United Methodist pastor

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Caregivers' calling

by Anthony B. Robinson

MY FATHER WAS diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease at the age of 80. Shortly after he received the diagnosis, I sat with him at the kitchen table. With a look of despair on his face, he said, "I don't know how I've let this happen to me." I tried to assure him that this wasn't something he had "let happen." To both of us, however, the diagnosis felt like a death sentence.

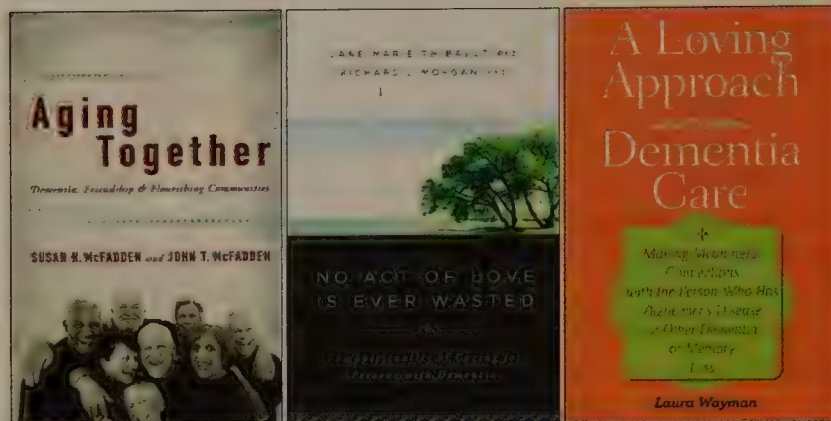
Had I read the three books listed here, especially Susan and John McFadden's *Aging Together* and its chapter "Receiving the Diagnosis," I might have been more helpful to my father in that difficult moment. I might also have had a more coherent response to the well-intentioned friends of my mother who told her, as my father's illness grew worse, that she should "simply forget him, let him go and act as if he were already gone." He needed precisely the opposite assurance—that he would continue to be loved and valued, and that he would have our support in living his life as well as possible amid adversity.

The McFaddens acknowledge that the announcement of a diagnosis of cognitive impairment or Alzheimer's can be devastating to hear. But they also imagine and argue that it can be otherwise:

If we understand the diagnosis of cognitive impairment as a kind of death sentence, delaying the diagnosis as long as possible makes strategic sense. . . . But if instead we view living with some degree of cognitive impairment as a next step in life's journey, one that does not preclude the possibility of living in a way that continues to be rich and fulfilling, then seeking diagnosis sooner can be helpful and positive.

As the North American population grows older and lives longer, more and more people will be hearing the diagnosis my father heard or will suffer some form of cognitive impairment from a cause other than Alzheimer's. According to Jane Thibault and Richard Morgan in *No Act of Love Is Ever Wasted*, "nearly 50 percent of the population will develop a dementing disorder by age eighty-five . . . and by 2050, as many as sixteen million Americans will have some form of dementia, with Alzheimer's being the most prevalent." There's another implication to all this, note Thibault and Morgan: "If you haven't yet been a caregiver, you likely will be one."

All three books address the manifold challenges facing individuals and families, religious congregations and society,



Aging Together: Dementia, Friendship, and Flourishing Communities

By Susan H. and John T. McFadden
Johns Hopkins University Press, 256 pp., \$55.00

No Act of Love Is Ever Wasted: The Spirituality of Caring for Persons with Dementia

By Jane Marie Thibault and Richard L. Morgan
Upper Room Books, 176 pp., \$16.00 paperback

A Loving Approach to Dementia Care: Making Meaningful Connections with the Person Who Has Alzheimer's Disease or Other Dementia or Memory Loss

By Laura Wayman
Johns Hopkins University Press, 128 pp., \$14.95 paperback

from the growing incidence of cognitive impairment, whether caused by Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, stroke or other less well-known possibilities. But authors, teachers and others who hope to influence our thinking face a challenge: most of us are so terrified of these disorders that we avoid facing them, much less learning about them, and are inclined, as were my mother's friends, to withdraw from those who suffer from them.

Anthony B. Robinson is president of the Seattle-based organization *Congregational Leadership Northwest*. His most recent book is *Stewardship for Vital Congregations (Pilgrim)*.

I was reading one of these books while on vacation with a group of friends. Spotting the word *dementia* in the title elicited an adverse reaction. “Dementia—why would you want to be reading about that?” Never mind that everyone in that group was somewhere between the late fifties and early seventies in age, which makes the topic relevant. The dread is at red-alert level, notes Margaret Morganroth Gullette in a recent *New York Times* op-ed column, “Our Irrational Fear of Forgetting.” “Greater public awareness of Alzheimer’s, far from reducing the ignorance and stigma around the disease, has increased it. People over 55 dread getting Alzheimer’s more than any other disease, according to a 2010 survey by the MetLife Foundation.” Gullette sees a fear that makes even absent-mindedness “a clinical symptom” in our “hypercognitive society.”

The authors of these books hope to lessen the dread, fear and stigma surrounding dementia by providing both information and stories, by reframing the ways that we think about cognitive disorders and those who suffer them, and by offering practical advice for caregivers and community.

Aging Together is the most prophetic and theological of the three. The McFaddens bring together their experience in the fields of gerontology and ministry in order to argue that “dementing illnesses” should be viewed as disability. Just as society and churches have taken steps to include people with other disabilities, so we need to include those suffering from dementia as well as those who care for them. The McFaddens note that even though half of people 85 and older suffer cognitive impairment in varying degrees, the prevailing norms for “healthy aging” do not allow any place for cognitive impairment. Measured against the standard images and norms for healthy aging, those who suffer dementia are abnormal, even failures. That was what my father felt when he received his diagnosis.

The McFaddens argue that the plight of those suffering dementia may say more about the fears, values and norms of our society than about the illnesses and those who suffer them.

Rather than understanding dementia as an experience shared by the entire community, whose role and responsibility is to accompany a valued member on this journey, it is treated as a

private tragedy to be dealt with by the individual, his or her family, medical professionals, and professional caregivers.

While acknowledging the role of medical and professional care, the authors argue that a key determinative factor in the sufferer’s well-being is social context—the community. The pervasive tendency to medicalize aging and to define it as a problem to be solved by medical interventions reflects the limits of our communities and our fears. This is not the case in all cultures. A Taiwanese medical student noted that she did not realize her grandfather had Alzheimer’s until she began

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attending school in the United States. "He changed as he got older, but to us, he was still just Grandfather."

Aging Together offers a prophetic perspective by challenging our socially constructed versions of reality and our tendency to look for medical miracles and cures. Instead we should work to create communities that are hospitable to the cognitively impaired.

Drawing on the work of theologians Stanley Hauerwas and Tom Reynolds, the McFaddens also see the church as a place that trains Christians in "subversive friendship": "Congregations are called to be schools for subversive friendship, subversive because they do not follow the script of the prevailing culture, which argues that there should always be a practical return for friendship."

A "practical return" for care and love is a theme of Thibault and Morgan's *No Act of Love Is Ever Wasted*. Thibault, a professor of gerontology, and Morgan, a chaplain, address the challenge of caregiving. Caregivers and others who support those with dementing illness may feel that their efforts, often made out of love and as a ministry of service, are not reciprocated or acknowledged; they may even feel that their time and energy are wasted.

Dementia is probably one of the most spiritually and theologically challenging of all illnesses because it calls into

question the nature of personhood. It causes us to ask such questions as: "Who am I when I can't name things and don't know what they are? Who am I when I can't think, can't love, and can't even respond to love? Who am I when I don't know who I am?"

The authors respond by calling both caregiving and care receiving part of our spiritual path. They acknowledge the depth and terror of these challenges but maintain that dementia sufferers continue to have a spiritual life and are capable of both spiritual growth and ministry to the spiritual growth of others.

Most of us are so terrified of cognitive disorders that we avoid facing them.

For this to happen, however, caregivers and others relating to those suffering dementing illness must be willing to enter into the experience of the impaired, listening for their cues and clues. "We [caregivers] need to enter their world" instead of trying to force our reality upon those who suffer dementia. Often the default response of family members, visitors and some caregivers is a "reality orientation"; they pepper the impaired with questions like, "Do you know who I am? What day is it? What did you have for breakfast?" The result of such an approach is usually increased anxiety, agitation and isolation.

Thibault and Morgan describe the relationship of caregiving and care receiving as a mutual spiritual path made visible by the caregiver's self-giving love. While one might argue that self-giving love is at the heart of Christian faith and discipleship, that doesn't mean it's easy or that it comes naturally, or even that we're very good at it. Can we enter into the world of the cognitively impaired in love when there is little practical return and little social validation for doing so? This is a test of our faith.

No Act includes a helpful chapter on planning and leading worship for those who suffer from dementia. Simply doing a shortened rerun of the Sunday morning service or sermon is not meaningful or effective. Thibault and Morgan offer suggestions that can adapt a congregation's regular worship, making it more inclusive for the cognitively impaired and differently abled.

I disagree with Thibault and Morgan at one point: they criticize churches and clergy for failing to offer effective ministry to dementia sufferers and challenge seminaries to add courses on aging and

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dementia. It's too easy, in my view, to "fix" problems by incorporating a new study into already stretched and fragmented seminary curricula. More realistic would be an effort to teach congregational members about dementia and train and equip them to relate to those among us who are cognitively impaired.

In *A Loving Approach to Dementia Care*, gerontologist Laura Wayman concentrates on practical advice for caregivers. Chapters include case studies that cover most of the challenges facing family and caregivers, from delusions and paranoia on the part of the cognitively impaired to how to persuade them to accept help or even to bathe.

Wayman says, for example, "You will never win an argument with someone who has dementia." She advocates the "affirmative response" method so that caretakers learn to affirm the emotions and experience of the impaired person even when his or her behavior is challenging. Only then can one begin to redirect the impaired person. As in parenting, the goal is to avoid power struggles. Wayman insists that all behaviors are forms of communication. She started a training program called the Dementia Whisperers; the idea is to listen, soothe and make progress without confrontation.

Wayman stresses that the cognitively impaired primarily relate emotionally rather than cognitively. They "read" the emotions and body language of a family member, visitor or caregiver. This means that those who function extremely well in a hypercognitive and rational mode may find themselves

"impaired" and thus ineffective when they enter the more emotive world of the cognitively impaired. "The person who has dementia," writes Wayman, "will feel what you are feeling and reflect those emotions back."

"In the caregiving process," she insists, "you [the caregiver] are the most important person, and if you do not take care of yourself, you will not be able to provide care for your loved one or client." She teaches caregivers how to manage themselves, their stress and, in some cases, their guilt.

All of the authors emphasize that although caregiving will often seem without reward, there are nonetheless moments, often unexpected, when the ill become the spiritual guides and mentors of the caregivers. In the final two years of his illness my father was in a care facility. On one of our last visits my wife and I walked arm-in-arm with my father to an enclosed, outside garden. By this time it was difficult to make out anything he said. But on that day, as we moved slowly toward the garden, he stopped. Looking up at me, he said clearly, "You are a good man."

"Did you hear that?" asked my wife. "Yes," I answered. "No," she persisted, "did you really hear? That's what you've been waiting so long to hear, isn't it? Your father just gave you his blessing." She was right. Several weeks later he died. I was blessed by his words to me that day—and by the many times during those last years when we sat together quietly on a bench in that garden. Such moments of companionship had eluded us during other times of our lives, but in those last years they were a gift of his illness.

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MINISTRY

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Pastor as witness

Kevin J. Long

Orchard Park, Indiana



Kevin J. Long is a graduate of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary. He serves as associate pastor at Orchard Park Presbyterian Church in suburban Indianapolis, where his responsibilities include preaching, adult discipleship and pastoral care.

What excites you most about ministry these days?

The eagerness with which so many people are listening to the gospel. Our world is full of so many voices offering happiness, success, significance, even salvation. But there is nothing quite like the gospel, and when it is faithfully proclaimed, by the power of the Holy Spirit people respond. I think people are becoming more aware of the vacuity of our cultural idols and are searching for an alternative. And though it doesn't happen every day, it is quite thrilling to see someone begin to grasp the good news of Jesus Christ.

Could you describe one such experience?

A woman at our church comes from a religious background that was pretty fundamentalist and judgmental—God was always angry at her. So guilt and fear have dogged her all her life. After hearing a few sermons on God's grace, love and forgiveness, she began stopping by my office to talk. It was clear that she was desperate to believe what she was hearing, but it was hard to reconcile it with what she had always thought. Over time, however, I began to see a change come over her, a light begin to shine in her. Sometimes I would even start say-

ing something and she would finish my sentence with delight. She was beginning to understand the power, the depth and the freedom of the gospel.

Then a terrible tragedy happened in her family, leading her to wrestle with the grace of God and come to stand on her own spiritual feet. It's been amazing to witness what God has done in her life as she has walked through these hard times. She's a different person than she was when I met her, and it's a privilege to be a part of something like that.

What's been the hardest part of parish ministry?

My church community is quite affluent—wealth and success are powerful idols here. So it's difficult to get people to make the church a priority in their lives; everyone is so overscheduled. But the most difficult thing is finding a way to bring the truth of the gospel into people's lives in such a way that it breaks through their cultural armor without resorting to clichés, advice or finger-shaking.

What's been most surprising?

The fact that I can do this. I'm a pastor's kid, and I spent most of my life insisting that I would never go into ministry. I never thought I had the right gifts for it. I'm a shy, quiet introvert; in school I always avoided taking classes requiring speeches. Given my personality, seminary sounded like a death sentence.

But I accepted God's call to become a pastor, trusting that God would go with me and equip me to do what God wanted me to do. Yet there is always that bit of fear that whispers, "What if I'm really on my own here? What if I shouldn't be in ministry after all?" But God has been unbelievably faithful. I am still shocked that I not only keep coming up with new sermons but that I also deliver them in front of hundreds of people. All I can say is that the Holy Spirit comes through.

What was your call experience like? Did it include reevaluating your sense of a lack of gifts for ministry? Or did you move forward purely on trust?

I had a hard time figuring out what to do with myself in my mid-twenties. I was back in Pittsburgh one weekend when someone told me that Ken Bailey, an old family friend, was preaching across town that Sunday. I hadn't seen Ken in a while, so I went.

In the middle of that service—during the song "Here I Am, Lord"—I had sort of a lightning-bolt moment. I felt God calling me into ministry, loud and clear. I just stood there with tears streaming down my face, because ministry was the last thing I wanted to do. So I had one of those comical arguments with God, in which I insisted that I would never go to seminary as a single guy. A few months later, I met the woman who I would marry in two years. I began to pray steadily for God's will in my life. Like a beach ball held under water, the call to ministry kept bouncing right back up in front of me. After months of praying for anything but seminary, I finally said, "Fine, I'll go to seminary. Just as long as I don't have to preach."

I was terrified at the idea of leading worship and speaking in front of so many people. I had as models for ministry my dad and Tom Tewell, the pastor at the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in New York. Both were extroverts with great charisma and peo-

"People are seeing the vacuity of cultural idols."

ple skills. If this is what it takes to be a minister, I figured, I'm not it. But I took a leap of faith. In seminary, God placed me at the feet of just the right people. I studied with Craig Barnes and Andrew Purves, who have personalities more like mine; my field education supervisor did as well. They showed me that someone like me could not only survive in ministry but even thrive.

When I was in seminary, Barnes was my pastor as well as my professor. He gave me a wonderful vision of what it means to be a pastor. My true homiletics class was sitting in the pews Sunday after Sunday at Shadyside Presbyterian. I spent my last year in Pittsburgh analyzing what he was doing, and I began to think to myself, "Hey, I think I can do that." Barnes also helped me to understand that one of my primary roles as pastor is that of witness: witnessing the salvation that Christ is working in the lives of my congregation and helping them develop the lenses to see it as well.

As for Purves, he pressed us hard about keeping Jesus Christ at the center of everything we do—because it's Christ's

ministry, not ours. Purves reminded us again and again that ministry is always a theological act, and he told us he'd come find us if we succumbed to "christological timidity."

Say more about what christological timidity is.

It's when I start to think that somehow Jesus is superfluous, a helpful tool in ministry but not really a necessity. It is preaching that fails to point to Jesus Christ and what he is doing in the world—or worse, that downplays his unique role in salvation. It is thinking that is anthropologically oriented rather than christologically oriented.

I think christological timidity arises from a failure to fully believe that Christ is the Savior and we are not. It is so easy for pastors to develop a messiah complex, to think that it is up to us to heal the sick and raise the dead. But our job is to pay attention to what Purves would call the "mischief" that the living Christ is up to in the lives of our people—and to point to it.

At a recent conference, I went to a breakout session about what it means for churches to be missional. It wasn't until more than halfway through the hourlong conversation that anyone mentioned Jesus—at which point the conversation improved dramatically. But why did it take so long?

Along with Barnes and Purves, who else has shaped your understanding of ministry?

William Willimon, especially in regard to preaching. I appreciate his critique of the American church, and he's taught me to listen to public rhetoric with a different ear. He's also helped me go through ministry with a sense of anticipation about what unpredictable thing Jesus might do next. Willimon emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit—not only in preaching the gospel but in hearing it. This has helped free me from worrying about the results of my preaching.

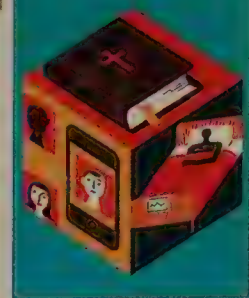
How have pastors and others with more experience been helpful? Or unhelpful?

I had the great privilege of coming into a church whose two other pastors have decades of experience behind them. It's been helpful to be able to walk down the hall and ask one of them what they think or how they would handle a particular dilemma. There is also a retired pastor in our congregation who has been an enormous blessing, letting me run ideas off him and pick his brain.

As for unhelpful, all pastors fall into bad habits of one sort or another. When you work with other pastors, sometimes it's easy to pick up those bad habits yourself. I think that the longer we are out of seminary, the easier it is to forget the theological grounding for ministry and simply do what is convenient or expedient rather than what is most faithful.

Who else do you turn to for collegiality and inspiration?

I meet twice a year with my PCUSA's Company of New Pastors group to discuss ministry and theology. And for the past two years I have been able to attend the Festival of Homiletics,



a wonderful opportunity to relax among colleagues for a week and listen to other preachers and teachers of homiletics.

I also listen to a lot of sermons and lectures online. My regulars are Barnes, Willimon and Jim Somerville (a Baptist preacher in Virginia). This gives me a chance to hear the word proclaimed, which is rare for most preachers. It also inspires me to take risks and try new things in the pulpit—as well as to expand my understanding of the gospel.

On the basis of your experience so far, how would you want to change your seminary curriculum?

I would certainly like to have had more training in public speaking. I had almost no experience in that before I came to seminary.

Would general public speaking training be helpful, or is preaching too particular a practice?

At least some basic training would be very helpful. Too many people don't understand that speaking publicly is not the same as talking to an individual. It's helpful to learn about pacing, pausing and finishing sentences without dropping your voice. I was fortunate to have a woman in my field education congregation who was something of an expert on this stuff. She would often gently remind me of these things.

But I do think that preaching is unique. It's not simply a matter of putting on a good vocal show—that can come across as more of a performance than a proclamation of the word.

More generally, I also think that there needs to be a change in the way preaching is taught. I'm not sure the standard method of having seminarians read books on preaching and then practice writing an approved type of sermon is that effective anymore. I think preaching, like ministry, is probably best learned from a mentor. Find a master preacher whose style

“Our job is to point to what Jesus is doing.”

connects with you and really study what that person does. I'm not sure how this would work at a seminary, but I think some kind of change is needed.

What does your denominational affiliation mean to you and your parishioners?

For many people in my congregation, it really doesn't mean much at all. Quite a few of our members come from other denominations. For them, the quality of the preaching, ministry and fellowship are more important than the label on the front of the church. But personally, I love being Presbyterian. True, it's all I've ever known, but I also love our tradition and theology and connectionalism. Being Presbyterian helps remind me that we didn't just make this stuff up, that our faith is an inher-

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itance passed down through the centuries. I have often wondered what tradition I would choose if I had to be something other than Presbyterian. I still don't know the answer.

What's your sermon-prep process? What resources do you find helpful?

I usually start on Monday by spending time pondering what the text might be trying to say to my people and searching for a hook, an axis on which the sermon will turn. For the next few days, I spend time in prayer and look through commentaries and other books. And I've learned that it is important for me also to spend time staring out the window, letting my imagination run as I try to dive beneath the text and consider how it might connect to the subtexts of my people's lives. Throughout the week, I take lots of notes—ideas from books, thoughts that come to me as I go.

On Thursday I try to envision a path for the sermon to take, weaving my thoughts into a coherent unit. It's almost like a play that has been broken up into pieces, and I have to figure out the best way to put it back together so that it will be coherent and meaningful. I spend Friday writing the sermon and Saturday editing and memorizing.

Do you preach entirely from memory?

I try to. I do often keep my manuscript with me, because I am prone to blank-out moments when even my own children's names would elude me. But I do my best not to use the manuscript. Not only does preaching from memory dramatically improve my delivery and timing, but the memorization process is the best editing tool I know. Even when I can't get it all memorized, the attempt leads to a much better sermon.

What developments would you like to see in your congregation's mission?

I'd like to see us engage in more local mission opportunities. Our community is quite affluent, but there are a lot of low-income families in the immediate vicinity of the church.

Describe an experience that made you think, "This is what church is all about."

Recently we began a mission project called Operation 3:16—the idea is to give in response to God's gift of Jesus Christ. Church members bring in supplies to make hundreds of bagged lunches, which

we deliver to a homeless shelter in Indianapolis. People arrive in midafternoon and start making sandwiches and packing bags. People of all ages come, and they have a blast.

It is particularly important for an affluent congregation to do things like this. As you drive past one neighborhood of mansions after another, it is easy to forget that there is such need so near to us. As I walked around watching everyone with gloves on making piles of sandwiches, talking and laughing, serving the poor, I thought to myself, "This is the way it should be. This is why we are here."

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by Stephanie Paulsell

Ordination season

SUMMERTIME IS a season of blessing, not least because so many ordinations happen then. Strung like jewels through the Sundays of June, July and August, ordinations shine out of the summer calendar like appointments highlighted by hope.

This summer I was fortunate to be able to attend and speak at the ordinations of three former students—one a Unitarian-Universalist, one a Presbyterian and one a new minister in the United Church of Christ. All three young women are exemplars of the “learned ministers” my school was founded to prepare. They know how to learn wherever they are—in a classroom or a hospital, a church or a rape crisis center, a library or a retreat center or a prison, and they know how to keep the boundaries between the knowledge produced in these diverse contexts fluid, so they can use what they have learned in one place to minister in another. I have benefited from their intellectual and pastoral agility in my classroom. I have been blessed by their preaching, their pastoral presence in worship and their leadership in our community.

Since I know these young women pretty well, I told stories of them as students, as young ministers in training. The wonderful thing about an ordination, though, is that the teacher’s story is not the only story—not by a long shot. We set our story down next to the story of the youth group leader who made a safe space for our student as she struggled with her faith as a teenager, the teaching pastor who invited our student into his pulpit, the friend who slept on our student’s couch during a rough patch, the parents who know just how complex a road has led to this moment. It takes all of us to narrate the story of a life reached by God’s call. We tell it in our prayers for and our charges to these new ministers, in the sermons and the music, in the stoles we embroider and place around their necks, and in the conversations that happen once we’ve all dried our eyes and said Amen. It’s the story of one life, but through it we can hear the steady beat of God’s call to all of us.

Ordinations illuminate for a moment the threads that link us to each other: school to congregation, teaching pastor to home pastor, parishioner to professor, parent to friend. When these threads light up on an ordination day, we suddenly remember how much we depend on each other, how much we need each other and how much we have to learn from each other. We remember that we never do our work alone.

All of this is thrilling, transformative. But what is truly breathtaking is to see someone step forward and say: this is what my life is going to mean. Ministry is my vocation.

These young women could have been anything they wanted to be. Would we be better off if they had decided to become economists? Business leaders? Politicians? As I write this column, the world is waiting to see how the U.S. stock market responds to the downgrading of the nation’s credit rating. Is ministry relevant to a world buffeted by economic upheaval and to a nation at odds with itself about how to solve its problems?

These new ministers would have done great work as economists, businesspeople or politicians. But it is crucial for the good of the world that they have become ministers. Ministry is human work—embodied and incarnational work. When someone decides to make herself available to the deepest possibilities our humanity holds, human history moves forward.

In a time governed by fear, it is a sign of hope to see someone willing to go all the way down and into the mystery of the

Ordinations illuminate for a moment the threads that link us together.

human life God created and called good. Only the most fearless explorers of all that it means to be human will be able to lead us in shaping new forms of living driven not by fear but by God’s call to care for one another.

At each ordination I attended this summer, I marveled as I heard stories I’d never heard before: stories of callings lost and found, of compassion and generosity, of ever-deepening attention to God. These ordinations reminded me that when my students arrive for the fall semester they will also be full of stories. These students will be accompanied by unseen presences to whom our school is indebted: parents, pastors, mentors, siblings, youth group leaders and friends. The ordinations remind me to be always making room in my classroom for other hidden presences—the communities my students have not yet met but to whom they will one day minister. The invisible threads that unite us in the work of ministry stretch not only across the places from which we come and the relationships that have sustained us, but out into a future that we can’t yet see.

Stephanie Paulsell teaches the practice of ministry at Harvard Divinity School.

IN Review

Young adult realities

by Andrew Root

Two opposing perspectives on the present generation of young people and their potential have dominated in the media and in the consciousness of church members. One group (discussed in books like Don Tapscott's *Growing Up Digital*) fawns over young adults, calling them the smartest generation ever and their altruism and creativity the salvation of our society. This interpretation is unsubtly countered by others, who say that this generation is probably the dumbest that has ever existed (as in Emory professor Mark Bauerlein's book, *The Dumbest Generation*).

Lost in Transition offers an insightful, balanced take on what the lead author calls "emergent adults"—those between 18 and 23. The book doesn't fall into either of the aforementioned ditches because the research behind the text reveals that emergent adults are neither the great hope of our nation (the so-called Obama generation) nor the crazed idiots disdained by some intellectuals. Christian Smith, a professor of sociology at Notre Dame, offers a way between those vast overstatements.

Smith is not new to the subject. This is his third book based on his nationwide survey of youth and religion. He presented the study's initial findings on high school-aged young people in *Soul Searching*; he then followed those young people to college and marked their religious changes in *Souls in Transition*.

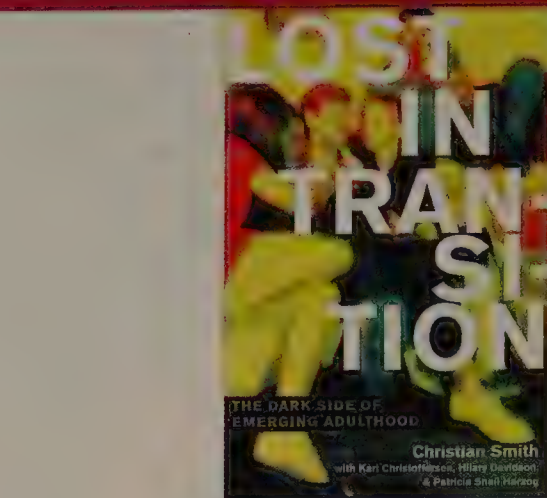
In *Souls in Transition*, Smith focused on the religious transition of young adults and employed the voice of sociological reporting. In *Lost in Transition*, he goes further, making direct and even moral assertions about the dark, potentially dangerous realities of the world of emergent adults. He offers what he calls a "critical, public sociology" and a "soci-

ological imagination" that examines cultural scripts and institutional realities.

This book packs a punch: Smith is not afraid to make known his opinion that although emergent adults are not the spawn of the devil, there is much that is dark and dangerous in the institutional and cultural currents in which they swim. But the darkness of those waters is not emergent adults' problem alone; nor is it their fault. Smith places strong responsibility on systems that adults have perpetuated, reminding us that the problems of emergent adults are the responsibility of the whole of society.

Smith sees five particularly dark realities blinding emergent adults and threatening their lives. The first is the lack of a moral compass. Unlike conservative hand-wringers, Smith is concerned not about what emergent adults' moral beliefs are but about something worse: they seem unable to enter into any kind of moral reasoning at all. They instead default to hyperindividualism, believing that whatever seems right to each person is moral. Smith found that a significant percentage of those interviewed would be willing to allow the possibility that almost anything is right—except judging others. Judging another's individual choice or action and thus impinging on that person's moral relativity is the only thing that is absolutely wrong.

The radicalization of individualism is writ large with Smith's second dark reality: consumerism. He shows that emergent adults see little that is problematic about consumption, other than being in debt. In other words, emergent adults think it is always right to buy what they desire if they can afford it. According to Smith, this consumption-oriented mentality has led young adults to define the good life in a



Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood

By Christian Smith

with Kari Christoffersen, Hilary Davidson

and Patricia Snell Herzog

Oxford University Press, 296 pp., \$27.95

way that has little or nothing to do with transcendence or the public good. Rather, almost all the emergent adults defined having a good life as having the means to buy what they want.

The third and fourth dark realities for emergent adults are connected: heavy drinking and unbounded sexual activity. Smith contends that emergent adults too often succumb to deep cultural and life-course scripts that assert that normal young adulthood is filled with drunken tales and forgotten sexual partners. Yet ironically, a large percentage of emergent adults reported boredom as their motivation for drinking. This leads Smith to argue that drinking and drug use may be two explicit signs of the boredom common in a hyperconsumeristic society that sees the fullness of life in individual acts of buying.

Sexual activity also seems to have something to do with boredom and drunken promiscuity, leading to the escalation of a hook-up culture in which emergent adults have sexual encounters with no desire for any kind of commitment other than having the sexual experience. According to this research, hooking up and dating appear to be mutually exclusive, unrelated realities.

Most young people have had their first hook-up prior to entering adulthood.

Andrew Root teaches youth and family ministry at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, and is coauthor of *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (InterVarsity Press).

Smith found that a majority had their first sexual experience by age 16. So what's the big deal? According to Smith, the big deal is the deep pain that young women in particular experience because of their sexual activity.

Although the researchers heard significant stories of confusion and loss due to sexual activity, to their perplexity they also heard emergent adults assert that they have few regrets even about the darkest of experiences. The respondents seemed to have a tenacious, almost irrational desire to avoid regret.

The final dark reality is young adults' lack of political engagement. Smith found little support for the media hype of the engaged "Obama generation" and instead encountered deep apathy and cynicism. Overwhelmingly, it appeared that emergent adults are optimistic about their own individual lives but much less so about national or global realities. Moreover, Smith found that emergent adults are simply not that interested in volunteering and that they rarely give to charity—often

because they imagine that they don't have money to give.

Smith points to the need for change in institutions: secondary education needs to provide moral education, the political system needs to lose its zero-sum rhetoric, the government needs to regulate alcohol advertising and universities need to concern themselves with the personal development of their students. And clearly there is a place for the church to join and support these efforts.

It became starkly clear as I read this important book that significant suffering and emptiness exist under the surface optimism of this cohort of young people. Individualism, boredom, sexual hurt and fear of admitting regret all point to the need for the church to use its theological imagination to speak of a God who meets us in our doubt and suffering when our shell of optimism is too fragile to hold our being. A theology of the cross that seeks God in the honest reflection of our own broken narratives comes to be of particular importance.

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Reading Obama: Dreams, Hope, and the American Political Tradition

By James T. Kloppenberg
Princeton University Press, 296 pp., \$24.95

Books on Barack Obama are proliferating. Recent additions include biographies, political analyses, a look into Obama's African family tree, books on his handling of specific issues and books on race and politics in American society. Among these, James Kloppenberg's intellectual contextualization stands out.

Kloppenberg began his study of Obama as an intellectual and political philosopher while lecturing at Cambridge University, and his engagement with European interpretations of Obama adds a fascinating counterpoint to his reading of American political traditions. Kloppenberg knows that Americans can be reluctant to perceive their most prominent politicians as philosophers, but he believes

that Obama's philosophical commitments put his policies in perspective.

Kloppenberg places Obama's writings and speeches into a rich context of both historical and contemporaneous texts. James Madison, John Dewey, Ralph Ellison, John Rawls and Abraham Lincoln come into the story. Kloppenberg carefully explains each particular contribution to Obama's political thought. He acknowledges that Obama's own writings—especially his popular books *Dreams of My Father* and *The Audacity of Hope*—were written for a general, not an academic, audience, but he believes that Obama is a gifted narrator who is able to interpret significant traditions of democracy and rearticulate them for a new political moment. Even while he does not agree with every Obama policy (he is especially critical of his actions on the economy and Afghanistan), Kloppenberg admires Obama's integration of these intellectual traditions.

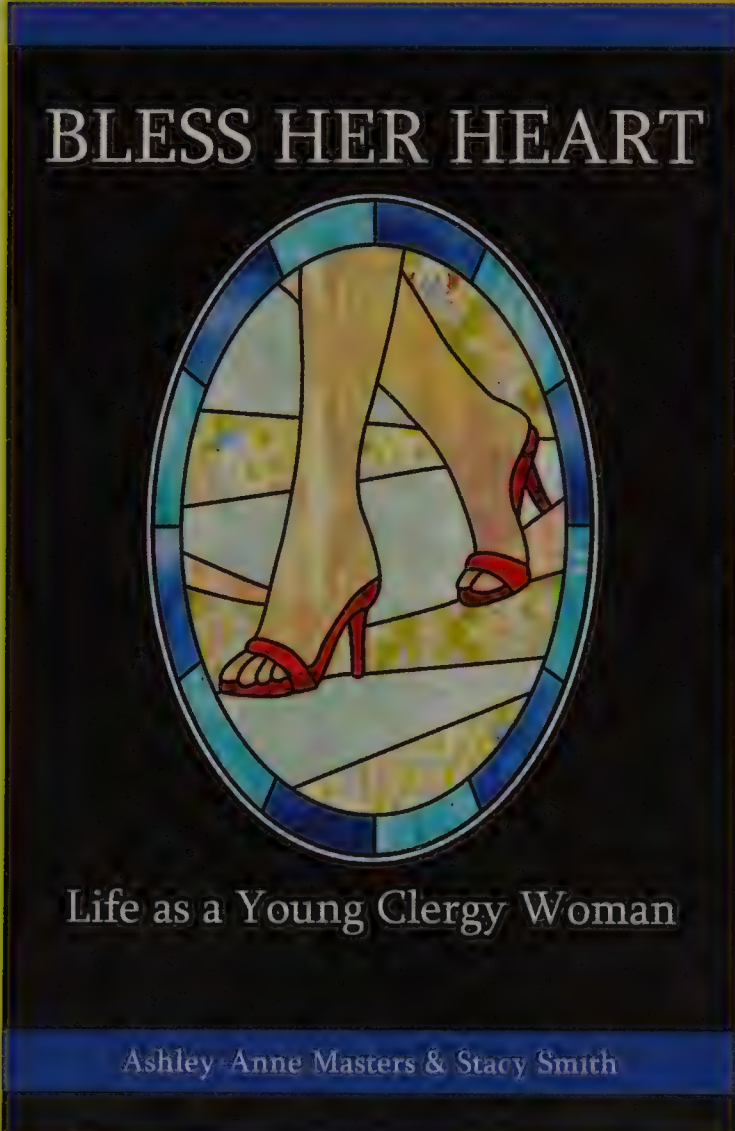
Kloppenberg sees Obama's political commitments as rooted in philosophical

pragmatism and a passion for deliberative democracy. He argues that Obama has come to see every assertion of truth as stemming from a particular point of view, and he has wrestled with how to understand that particularity alongside the universal ideals that guided his parents and grandparents and are articulated in his Christian faith. The resulting pragmatic platform values compromise, the admission of fallibility and the ever-changing dynamics of a democratic process.

Thus Obama believes that there are no final solutions or absolute truths in democratic politics. This does not mean that there are no values, but instead that values must be contested in the public arena. Obama does not necessarily reject absolute truth for himself, but he knows that democratic governments cannot function by it. This is the paradox of democracy. On the one hand, writes Kloppenberg, "we are constituted by the values we cherish, the principles we seek to realize, and the democratic process whereby we attempt to reach those goals." On the other hand, "we must not pretend that the meaning of those shared principles has ever been anything but contested." Even when two democratic citizens use the same vocabulary—justice, freedom, equality—they cannot be sure that their neighbor means the same thing. They must meet through a deliberative process to move their society toward these ideals, seeking common ground.

Obama has embraced what political philosopher John Rawls calls "overlapping consensus" as a political endeavor. This means that Obama seeks places where the commitments and goals of seemingly opposing groups come together, and then he works from that place. This is a form of philosophical pragmatism that is essential to democracy. Kloppenberg uses Obama's now famous 2006 speech on religion and the Democratic Party as an example. In this speech, Obama points out that Democrats and religious people share a great deal and that by seeking common ground, they can work to accomplish shared goals. Similarly, Obama sought this common ground when he spoke


Reviewed by Amy Frykholm, special correspondent to the CENTURY.




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about race during the 2008 campaign. He did not deny the validity of individual perspectives, but he sought, through the use of empathy and dialogue, to draw various parties to the same table.

For many of Obama's critics, this pragmatic, empathetic and deliberative technique is considered a major weakness, but Kloppenberg sees it as a strength. He thinks that Obama is attempting to "resuscitate a much older way of thinking about politics" and that he is aware that this is a difficult task in the current environment. But Obama's view is a long one and will serve American democracy well. "The willingness to endure acceptable compromise instead of demanding decisive victory over one's opponents has been an enduring feature of American democratic culture," Kloppenberg writes, and he believes that Obama is reviving it with patience and skill.

Democracy is always unfinished. It always means another battle, another conversation, ever-widening circles of participation and a bumpy road toward commonly shared goals. Democracy involves constant opportunity for self-correction. It can be brutally slow, but it remains the best form of governance possible precisely because it has to rely on deliberation and correction. Kloppenberg sees Obama working from pragmatist philosopher Richard Bernstein's principle of fallibilism: all positions, however passionately held, are subject to correction when seen in a bigger context or examined from another point of view.

Kloppenberg sees this stance as especially important for understanding Obama's Christian faith. Unlike his European colleagues, he does not believe that Obama used his membership at Trinity United Church of Christ for political expediency. He believes that Obama cherishes and draws on Christian traditions and virtues and that he sees community connection and identity as fundamental to full humanity. At the same time, Kloppenberg sees Obama as more of a natural skeptic than a true believer. The tradition of philosophical pragmatism is at work when Obama turns to personal narrative to articulate his faith instead of making declarations of theological certainty. He puts his religious views in context, sets them against the beliefs and commitments

of others and tries to evaluate them fairly even from his own limited perspective.

The pursuit of democratic ideals requires transforming self-interest into public good. Balancing freedom and equality is critical because only equal citizens can be truly free, and yet individual paths must be respected. Democracies face many dangers in this difficult equation: "Self-reliance and independence can morph into selfishness and license, ambition into greed, patriotism into jingoism, faith into self-righteousness, and charity into paternalism." Navigating these waters means drawing people out of their shells and into the public arena, where their views can be challenged and tested by the views of others.

Kloppenberg sees Obama's presidency as potentially hinging on his ability to correct the vast economic inequality that has overtaken the United States in the last 30 years. Obama, along with political actors from Thomas Jefferson to Franklin Roosevelt, knows that economic inequality is a significant threat to democracy, which requires the participation of empowered

actors who are relatively equal to one another, people who are well educated and capable of critical thinking. Extreme concentrations of wealth undermine these dynamics. While Kloppenberg thinks that Obama is aware of the significance of economic inequality, he remains uncertain of Obama's ability to transform it. "Will Obama resist, or will he succumb to a vision of political economy that places the interests of investment bankers over those of unemployed job seekers? His long-term legacy will depend on that answer."

Beyond the moment's political wrangling, Kloppenberg believes that Obama is committed to the ongoing work of democracy, however difficult. He is driven by a belief that Americans can find common ground and work toward common solutions. We share, Obama writes, a "tradition based on the simple idea that we have a stake in one another, and that what binds us together is greater than what drives us apart." In Kloppenberg's view, any revival that Obama can bring of that democratic tradition will be a gift.

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God's Arbiters: Americans and the Philippines, 1898-1902

By Susan K. Harris
 Oxford University Press, 288 pp., \$35.00

Once upon a time, there was a large, wealthy and powerful country that wanted to help a smaller, struggling, powerless country find a pathway into a more stable, democratic, freedom-loving and civilized future. The powerful nation believed that its ways were enlightened and progressive, motivated by the blessings and wisdom of Christendom; it considered the ways of the smaller nation superstitious, backward, unstable and violent.

Meanwhile, in smoky rooms removed from public inspection, certain wealthy leaders of industry pursued their own secret agendas—mainly the opening up of markets for expanding capitalist interests and the plundering of rich natural resources hidden away in the hinterlands

of the much less technologically savvy nation, which they aimed to occupy and plunder. All these manipulations, of course, were masked by the propaganda of moral duty and "benevolent assimilation," terms much exploited at the time.

Does any of this sound familiar? I'm describing, perhaps surprisingly, the U.S. relationship with the Philippines just over a century ago. It involved the first of many major American interventions in Asia, during which atrocities and injustices took place under the banner of Christian civilization. Sadly, as Susan K. Harris points out in this intriguing study of America's rise as an imperial power, hardly any Americans today know about those events of yesteryear. The American annexation of the Philippines has been historically subsumed into the Spanish American War, which is itself nearly lost to the hazy selection processes of our collective memory. (The annexation of Hawaii at around the same time is another sad tale that nobody seems to know about.) When we think of these events at all, it still tends to be in terms of a "benevolent" intention to "uplift" and "Christianize" the "native" or "primitive" peoples—strategies that are still very much in play these days.

Most Americans reject the concept of American empire and know little or nothing about the nation's imperial traditions. Obstreperous polemicists who claim that the United States is historically a Christian nation ignore or deny the brutal political maneuverings of the past—including some, like the debacle of the Philippines, that were carried out specifically in the name of Christian mission and benevolence. President William

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McKinley claimed around the turn of the century, for instance, that the nation's goal was "to educate the Filipinos, and uplift and civilize and Christianize them." Senator Albert Beveridge went further, claiming that the founders had intended that the United States become "the arbiter, under God, of the destinies of mankind." Good intentions, to be sure. But it is arrogant to claim that the United States should judge all nations as an arbiter, and as any number of recent volumes conclude, the concept of benevolent assimilation reeks of irony.

God's Arbiters reopens the closets concealing these dusty skeletons of our national past: it is an elaboration of the ideologies at work in the United States from roughly 1898 to 1902 that provided the means and motivation for imperial adventures undertaken under the banner of the Lord, as McKinley and many others asserted. Central beliefs and values called for an overlapping of religious and racial identities that has been a source of great confusion throughout U.S. history—and still is. One might think that Christian intellectuals would clarify this confusion and reject outright the idea that the United States is the site of the kingdom of God on earth. Instead, Christian leaders have often been the most vocal supporters of Christian-nation ideology. This despite the sheer heft of historical atrocities, not the least of which occurred in the Philippines, where promises were broken and treaties ignored and where women and children were murdered in the name of God and country.

Harris claims that for leaders of that era, *American* was basically code for white and Protestant—a debatable assertion that Harris backs up with much evidence: the political rhetoric of figures from McKinley to Beveridge, tinged with Anglo-Saxon supremacy; the sermons and editorials of outright racists like Thomas Dixon and a variety of more mainstream overseas missionaries; and history textbooks used by U.S. school-children. Americans today are tired of hearing about racism, but very few understand the horrific depth of the

problem, including the historical effects of what were mainstream Anglo-Saxon supremacist views.

God's Arbiters shows how religious bias, racial elitism and the ideology of American exceptionalism permeated those times from the top down. Filipinos were commonly depicted as a dark-skinned and primitive people, and their widespread embrace of Roman Catholicism was dismissed as pagan and superstitious, a clear sign of their immaturity as a race. The volume is handsomely illustrated with a variety of graphics as well, many of them political cartoons illustrating the sickening racial overtones of the nationalisms of that period.

Harris commences with a striking anecdote: Mark Twain, arriving back in the United States in October 1900 after several years abroad, announced in his first interview, "I am an anti-imperialist." Twain admitted that when he left American shores four years earlier, he had been a "red-hot imperialist.... I wanted the American eagle to go screaming

into the Pacific." Why the dramatic change? Here Harris, author of two books and many articles on Mark Twain, is in top form. In her able telling, Twain was a man on a mission. He had become a critic of the very ideology to which he had long been captive: the grand narrative of American supremacy and conquest.

As horror and betrayal unfolded in the Philippines, Twain read widely about the events and decided that the America he believed in had betrayed its founding principles. He was particularly disturbed by the U.S. refusal to honor Philippine independence, by the dubious origins of the Battle of Manila Bay in 1899, by America's betrayal of the first elected Philippine president, Emilio Aguinaldo (the leader of the freedom movement, whom Twain considered a hero on the order of George Washington), and by the brutal installation of an American regime headed initially by William Howard Taft, later to become U.S. president. Twain was also inflamed by the irony of the U.S. dismissal of Aguinaldo's "declaration of

Reviewed by Harold K. Bush Jr., who teaches American literature at Saint Louis University.

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independence,” which presumably reflected America’s dearest ideal. Twain’s protest takes the form of a jeremiad; he is not a hater of America (as protesters are often caricatured), but a great lover of all that America can and should represent to the world.

Many other stories here will rouse the curiosity of literary scholars and cultural historians. Beveridge is one of the most interesting political leaders of our history, yet his name is largely forgotten. A wonderful yet brief section covers the humorous 1902 novel *Captain Jinks, Hero*, by Ernest Crosby, which satirizes the rhetoric of benevolence. Harris also analyzes the pietistic novel *In His Steps* (1896), by the minister Charles Sheldon, and such completely forgotten memoirs as those by Frank Steward and Mary H. Fee. All these texts, says Harris, are filled with the sinister undertones of American ideologies.

In her concluding comments, Harris proves once again that Mark Twain’s observations were often uncanny in their prescience. Perhaps most telling was his

use of the term *quagmire* to describe what was developing in the Philippines: it was “a quagmire from which each fresh step renders the difficulty of extraction immensely greater.” Twain, says Harris, was the first and most important progenitor of a grand comic tradition critiquing American imperial arrogance, a tradition that is laced with satire and irony and leads directly to the likes of today’s *Union* publication and Jon Stewart.

For a very long time, Americans have resisted recognizing and confronting their imperial impulses and admitting to the massive footprints they’ve left here and there around the globe. Harris’s timely study reveals that these footprints have deep historical and ideological roots.

Americans continue to justify the nation’s military adventures by invoking God, progress and the “benevolent” desires of “God’s arbiters,” who have been appointed to mediate the destinies of humankind and to bring light to a darkened world. Some things, evidently, never do change.

BookMarks

The Messenger: Friendship, Faith, and Finding One’s Way

By Douglas John Hall

Cascade Books, 192 pp., \$22.00 paperback

For nearly a half century Hall has been one of Canada’s finest theologians, a gift to the international church. Were it not for having met Robert W. Miller in his youth, Hall would probably have pursued a career in music instead. In *The Messenger* Hall delivers an appreciative tribute to his mentor and friend, making the reader wish one had personally known Miller. A United Church of Canada pastor and theological student at the time when Hall met him, Miller studied with some of the greatest theologians in the mid-20th century. Miller became a leader in the progressive Student Christian Movement that played a strong role on Canadian university campuses at the time. Most poignant is Hall’s account of how a younger generation in the movement that didn’t appreciate Miller’s style edged him out as manager of an SCM-related bookstore that he had developed in Toronto. Hall discreetly addresses the question of whether Miller was gay. *The Messenger* demonstrates the value of mentors in life and in the church.

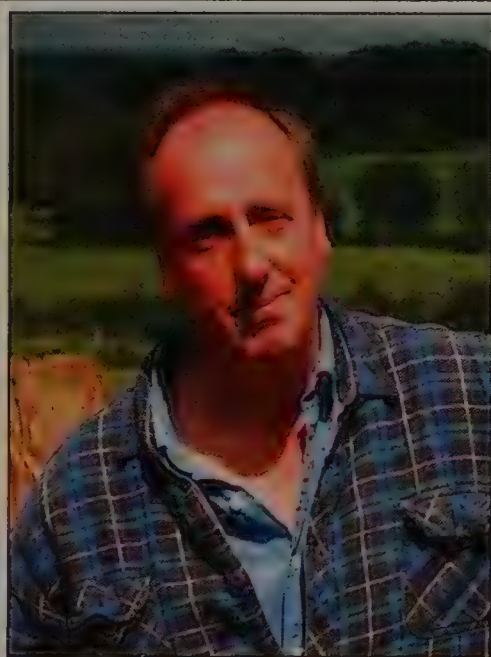
Augustine of Hippo: A Life

By Henry Chadwick

Oxford University Press, 208 pp.,

\$16.95 paperback

The manuscript for this biography was rediscovered among Chadwick’s papers after he died. (A shorter version of it was published as *Augustine: A Very Short Introduction*.) One could not find a better access point into the life and thought of Augustine than this very readable yet erudite account. Chadwick, who also published a splendid translation of Augustine’s *Confessions*, is a master at narration and exposition and his writing is a pleasure to read. While he clearly respects Augustine’s genius, he does not hesitate to point out where he thinks Augustine got things wrong or, at best, muddled—as on sex, marriage and original sin.



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Another Earth

Directed and co-written by Mike Cahill
Starring and co-written by Brit Marling

Screenwriters love genre pieces because they provide definition and structure. When all else fails, scribes can always fall back on their audience's understanding of the way the genre game is played.

Redemption movies and science fiction films are popular genres that have thrived since moviemaking began—guilt and wonderment have never been out of style. *Another Earth*, a Sundance darling that has gained attention by word of mouth, follows the latest cinematic trend by combining both genres into one mysterious, if uneven, film. The genre mix isn't as pronounced as in *Cowboys and Aliens*, which screams its high-concept merger in its title. But *Another Earth* is still a curious blend that can cause dizziness.

The story orbits around Rhoda (rising star Brit Marling, who also co-wrote the script), a high-achieving young woman who has just gotten into MIT to study astrophysics. The same night she finds out about her acceptance, word spreads around the globe that scientists have discovered a second Earth, almost identical to our own. Rhoda's curiosity about the new orb, combined with too much acceptance-letter partying, leads to a drunken car crash that leaves a young mother and son dead and a father emotionally ravaged.

Four years later, Rhoda is out of prison but racked with guilt. She hides

THE NEW WORLD: Following a car accident that leaves her consumed with guilt, Rhoda (Brit Marling) longs to start over on the recently discovered planet, Earth 2.

out as a janitor at a high school—until she unexpectedly spots composer John Burroughs, the man who survived the crash. She longs to apologize but finds it too painful. And there is an alternative to figuring out how to address her guilt: winning a contest for a one-way ticket to Earth 2, where Rhoda can start over.

The concept of a parallel universe is nothing new. *The Twilight Zone* employed it in at least half a dozen episodes. But the merging of the genres allows director and co-writer Mike Cahill to spin the idea in a different direction: we are less concerned about the planet itself and more interested in it as a place to hide from our tragedies while still viewing shadows of our own lives. Interestingly, the film is at its weakest when it is hewing to the familiar demands of the genre, especially in the somewhat clumsy first act. It picks up steam as the story boils down to a heated confrontation between love and guilt. Will Rhoda fess up and tell John who she really is? Will she fly away to Earth 2 to escape her agony, or will she stay on Earth 1 to work out the problems she has created?

Most of the film's third-act rebound is due to Marling's understated performance. She never allows Rhoda to tip her hand, so we are left wondering what is going on in her head, right up to the magical final shot—which suggests that *Another Earth* may have more on its mind than it first suggests.

The Devil's Double

Directed by Lee Tamahori
Starring Dominic Cooper

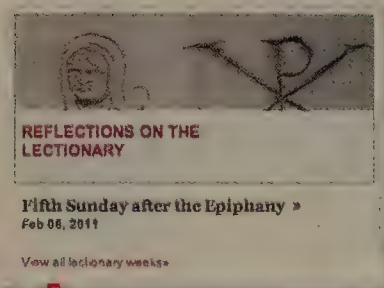
The *Devil's Double* seems destined for midnight screenings on college campuses, maybe on a double bill with *Scarface*. Both films concern a psychotic cocaine-snorting killer. This time it is Uday Hussein, son of Saddam, who is living la dolce vita in Baghdad right before the first Gulf War. For his own protection, Hussein decides he needs a “fiday”—a body double—just like Dad. He chooses his ex-schoolmate Latif Yahia, threatening to slaughter his old pal's family unless he agrees to take the job.

Somewhere in this vat of depravity is a movie screaming to get out, but writer Michael Thomas and director Lee Tamahori never seem to heed the call. Instead, they just lay out a series of cruel and bloody scenes, which include rape, disfigurement, torture and, in the film's biggest set piece, a disemboweling.

Alas, all this excess squanders the remarkable performance of young Dominic Cooper, who as both Uday and Latif bounces effortlessly between bellowing and seething. Cooper deserved a cohesive script about the way absolute power corrupts or about how the sins of the father are visited upon the son.

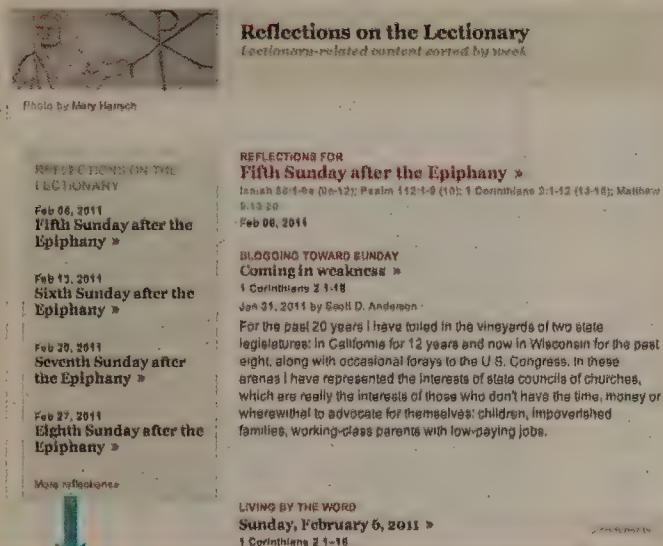
Reviewed by John Petrakis, who teaches screenwriting in Chicago.

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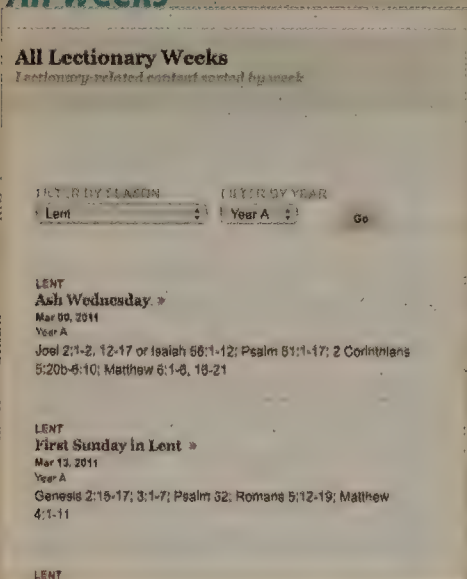
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by Philip Jenkins

The Dutch Bible Belt

I am writing these words in the heart of the Bible Belt. I'm in a small town that is traditionally pious but has swelled in recent years with the infusion of well-educated commuters who have left the nearby big city to escape crime and immorality. Here and in neighboring communities, newly built megachurches are growing. They preach a very traditional orthodox theology. Also booming are hard-line right-wing political parties which take very conservative positions on issues such as homosexuality, abortion and gender roles.

This certainly is not the standard picture that Americans have of the Nether-

religion in Europe as a whole.

The belt is the location of the conservative and ultra-orthodox Reformed churches and sects that refused to join the general movement toward Protestant unity. Although these groups account for just 4 or 5 percent of the population, their geographical concentration gives them a profound influence. In the purest orthodox communities, women long wore the traditional clothing that defined these black-stocking churches. In this area at least, church leaders can still aspire to the kind of Calvinist

1960s contributed powerfully to the general secularization. But among the ultraorthodox churches, the pillars survive intact, allowing believers to live their whole lives within denominational limits.

The new megachurches demonstrate this local power. Built by sects like the Gereformeerde Gemeenten (Reformed Parishes), megachurches have arisen in the past decade or so in belt towns like Barneveld, Veenendaal, Staphorst, Opheusden and Zwolle. The buildings seat 2,000 to 3,000 every Sunday, and like American megachurches they offer a

biblical teachings. Although the SGP has next to no presence in most of the nation, it regularly attracts 10 to 15 percent of votes in the Bible Belt, and it constitutes the majority in some small communities. Other conservatives favor the ChristianUnion, which in recent years has shocked some observers by taking its strongly pro-family and communitarian message outside the ultra-orthodox heartland.

Of course, groups like the SGP can never dream of national political power. Bible Belt church leaders need never confront the compromises of religious principle that a national political effort would entail. Other political trends, though, raise real concerns, especially the rise of new national right-wing movements that threaten to seduce tradition-minded religious voters.

The greatest danger is the Party for Freedom, led by anti-immigration and anti-Islam activist Geert Wilders, who might someday win national power. While agreeing with Wilders's calls to assert and defend Christian civilization, Protestant pastors worry that their moral message might easily become lost in racist and anti-immigrant rhetoric. Although the Dutch Bible Belt has succeeded, almost incredibly, in keeping its identity through the centuries, real conflicts lie on the horizon.

In parts of the Netherlands, the sabbath is strictly observed, even enforced by law.

lands. But the Dutch have a Bible Belt, or Bijbelgordel, which runs from the northeast of the country to the southwest. Its borders can be easily mapped using patterns of religious affiliation and political voting. It is not a large territory—in places it is only 30 or 40 miles wide—but it represents a substantial portion of this small country (the entire Netherlands is only about as large as Maryland and Delaware combined).

The persistence of a rigorously orthodox Protestant area in such a bastion of progressive liberalism must make us rethink any generalizations we might be tempted to make about the state of

moral discipline that prevailed in places like Scotland, the Netherlands or New England in 1630. Everywhere, the sabbath is strictly observed, and it's enforced by law in some communities. Many families refuse to own televisions. Some villages ban swearing.

The Netherlands was long famous for the "pillars" that defined everyday life. People adhered to one or another of three pillars, Catholic, Protestant or Socialist-secular, and that membership strictly determined the schools and institutions that one attended, the newspapers and radio programs that shaped one's opinions, and the political parties one voted for. The collapse of those pillars in the

comprehensive roster of activities throughout the week. One church in Drachten has been proudly termed the European Saddleback.

As in the United States, the Dutch Bible Belt has long been a base for conservative political activism. One potent movement is the long-established Reformed Political Party (Staatkundig Gereformeerde Partij, or SGP), which holds extraordinarily traditionalist views on gender and social issues. Not until 2006 did the party even admit women to full membership. It supports repealing most aspects of Dutch social liberalism and seeks to restore capital punishment in accordance with

Philip Jenkins's Notes from the Global Church appears in every other issue.

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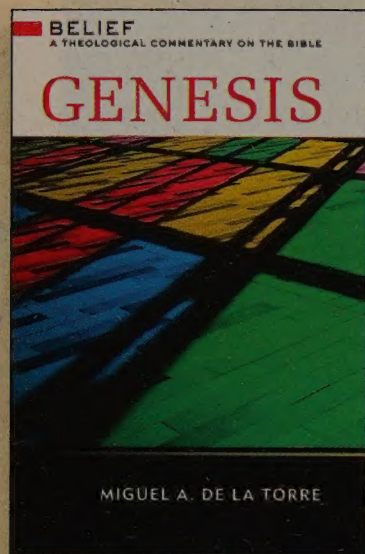
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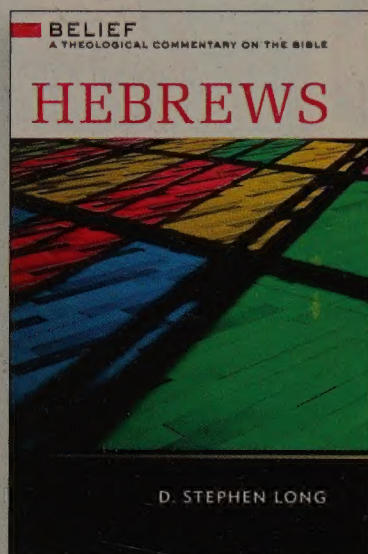
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